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Disclaimer

FINAL UPDATE: 2/13/2021 - *I can't express how happy it makes me seeing that people are still enjoying this old fanfic! I would still love to do a rewrite of this and make the story even better, I even started on a rewrite back in 2019, but I feel like it's fair to say that I'd like to move on to other things, maybe one day I'll even write and actually publish something of my own not having to do with the Warriors series. I'll leave this decision open, as I don't know what the future has in store and maybe one day I'll feel like officially making the rewrite, but I simply don't have the time or energy to do so right now.*

I'll still be keeping this fanfic up despite the entire thing basically being a rough draft in my eyes. I know people still like it, so I'm not going to just randomly delete it. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for the support and taking the time to read my stupid little fighting cats story!

UPDATE: 3/7/19 - *Just wanted y'all to know this fic is old and therefore has a ton of inconsistencies, as well as the story, characters and relationships not feeling as polished as I wanted them to be. Maybe in the future, I'll do a rewrite of Loyalty Dwindles, but for now, I just want you to keep that in mind when you're reading this. Because looking back on this piece of work now, there's a LOT I would've done differently!!*

Hello to whomever has started to read this fic! I hope you enjoy it, but I need to mention something first. I don't want to spoil my readers, but one certain thing needs to be said in this story so people don't freak out or stop reading when they find this out.

This fic contains a gay couple.

I personally don't see anything wrong with this, as it's not the main focus of this story and I support LGBTQ+ rights, as I'm in a same-sex relationship at the moment and I'm Pansexual. But it certainly is

a part of the story, and is between two main characters.

There are **no** sexual things in this fic, this is a perfectly innocent relationship where these two characters grow by bouncing off one another's personalities.

So those of you who frown upon same-sex couples, or same-sex Warriors characters, there's your warning. Any hate towards homosexuality in comments will be removed and ignored.

That's all for now and I hope to not repeat myself several times after this on this matter. Please enjoy the story!

Character Designs

Whenever I finish a character design from this series I'll put it on this page! Feel free to make some fanart and show me!
Warning: Contains mild spoilers and old art!

Twitter: https://twitter.com/xBorealix

Main Characters:

[image]

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Secondary Characters:

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Allegiances

Windclan:

Leader: Heronstar - A small light gray tom with blue eyes

Deputy: Palespeck - A golden brown she-cat with darker spots and yellow eyes.

Medicine Cat: Silveroak- A small silver she-cat with white patches and ice blue eyes.

Warriors:

Jaytuft- A fluffy gray tortoiseshell tom with green eyes

Redstripe- Reddish brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Fawnpool- A brown she-cat with white paws and amber eyes

Pineblaze- A brown tabby tom , pale yellow eyes

Embermask- A white tom with ginger face markings, hazel eyes

Badgerfur- Black and white she-cat with pale amber eyes

Thrushspirit- A thick-furred gray-brown tom with dark hazel eyes

Juniperlight- A black she-cat with a white tipped tail and yellow eyes

Sorrelscar- A slender dark ginger she-cat with lighter markings with a scar over her eye, green eyes

Webcloud- A cream and white tabby tom with blue eyes

Apprentices:

Robinpaw -A long haired dark brown tom with ginger patches and blue-purple eyes. *(Mentor is Fawnpool)*

Hollypaw- A broad shouldered silver she-cat with dappled fur and dark blue eyes. *(Mentor is Palespeck)*

Queens:

Starlingwing- A brown yellow eyed she cat with white speckles on her back. *Kits:* **Pebblekit** (a mottled brown she-cat with honey colored eyes), **Frostkit** (a white tom with two light brown front paws and pale green eyes) *Mate:* **Jaytuft**

Elders:

Streamheart- A slender pale ginger tabby she-cat with blind green eyes

Oatstep- A golden tabby tom with hazel eyes

Shadowclan:

Leader: Mintstar- A thick furred dark gray she-cat , pale green eyes

Deputy: Ottertail- A big brown and black striped tom with black

paws, amber eyes

Medicine cat: Tawnyclaw- A dark ginger she-cat with black stripes, yellow-green eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Berryfur- A thick furred silver and black striped tom , pale green eyes.

Warriors:

Aspenshade- A dark blue-gray tom with amber eyes and a scarred pelt.

Thistlejaw- A broad shouldered blue-gray tom with yellow eyes.

Leopardwhisper- A black tom with darker spots with one amber eye and one yellow eye.

Dovedapple- A pale brown and silver tabby she-cat , with blue-green eyes.

Whirlsplash- A big pale gray spotted tabby she-cat with black patches, with blue eyes.

Marshfoot- A long furred brown tom with black paws and pale yellow eyes

Ebonyfern- A dark gray tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Apprentices:

Crowpaw- A long furred dark gray tom with white markings and green eyes *(Mentor is Whirlsplash)*

Queens:

Swiftflower- A sleek pale gray and black dappled she-cat with hazel eyes. *Kits:* **Breezekit** *(*a small gray dappled she-cat with hazel eyes), **Newtkit** (a dark brown tom with black tipped ears and a light brown muzzle, golden eyes), **Fogkit** (a gray tabby tom with amber eyes). Mate*:* **Ottertail**

Elders:

Jaggedfang- A thin tawny tom with a scarred face and a fang resting over his lower lip.

Thunderclan:

Leader: Oakstar- A pale brown tom with white ears and a white muzzle, light blue eyes.

Deputy: Sparrowstrike- A dark brown and white she-cat with dappled fur, green eyes.

Medicine cat: Tigerfrost- A long furred blue-gray tabby tom with white markings, black ears and amber eyes.

Riverclan:

Leader: Smokestar- A light gray and silver she-cat , golden eyes.

Deputy: Tangleflame- A dark ginger spotted she-cat ,amber eyes.

Medicine cat: Lilywhisker- A light brown she-cat with a white underbelly, yellow eyes.

Cats Outside the Clans:

Adder- Slender dusty brown tom with rusty brown stripes and white paws/markings with green eyes.

Pandora- A calico she-cat with ice blue eyes and a collar.

Prologue

The first light of dawn broke through over the horizon. Sunlight slowly creeping over the brittle, dry grass of the moor, turning everything a golden haze in its path. Birds began their cheery morning songs that seemed to echo for miles across the territory.

However in the WindClan camp, things weren't so cheerful. Silveroak, the clan medicine cat sat over a motionless body of a senior warrior. She carefully put a paw over the dusty brown tom's eyes and closed them. Her ear flicked upwards as the clan leader stepped into the medicine den.

"Silveroak, has..has Dustblaze joined StarClan?" Heronstar's voice was thick with grief.

"Yes Heronstar, I'm afraid so" the silver she-cat replied and gently flicked her tail against Heronstar's shoulder to comfort him.

"I'm sorry brother. I know he was a brilliant mentor to you"

Heronstar quickly nodded and looked down at his paws, trying to hide his sadness the best he could, "Too many of our best warriors have joined StarClan these past moons. Have you found out if there's any sickness that could cause this?"

Silveroak glanced back at Dustblaze's corpse, completely silenced for a few moments before meowing a reply.

"No. I haven't found anything. No signs of sickness nor infection from any battle wounds"

Heronstar let out a frustrated sigh, his fur standing up on his neck. *I cannot just stand by and watch my clanmates die!* But what else could he do when Silveroak had no ideas on what could be the cause of these deaths? Perhaps it was a sign from StarClan that their clan

had no hope of survival anymore. It had happened with other clans in the past, why *couldn't* it happen to them?

"Heronstar. If it will put your mind at ease, at the next half-moon meeting I will try to speak with Starclan about it. Maybe I'll even mention it to the other medicine cats" his sister gave him a reassuring gaze.

All he could do was agree. For the sake of his clan he had to look over all the options. Even the ones that he *didn't* want to look upon.

What if....

Heronstar padded out of the medicine den and looked around at the awakening camp. His deputy Palespeck had organized the dawn patrol consisting of Redstripe, Embermask, Badgerfur and Hollypaw.

He'd break the news about Dustblaze when they returned. For now he was lost in his own thoughts that kept piercing at him like a thorn.

What if someone in WindClan *is behind all this? Trying to destroy our Clan from within..*

Chapter 1

Twigs crackled beneath Adder's paws as he made his way through the patch of trees near the makeshift nest he'd made the day before. The scorching Greenleaf sun warmed his fur, which had caused him to sleep in longer than usual. His mind was fuzzy with drowsiness despite his rest.

Need to find water and some prey. Then I can continue my journey to the Clans!

Adder's pelt prickled with excitement. He'd lived as a rogue with his mother all ten moons of his life, after her death he continued taking care of himself for a while, but he imagined it was nothing like being a part of a clan. To have other cats to talk to, to have a more abundant amount of prey, and a guaranteed nest to sleep in. He remembered a particular night when he had to climb a tree and sleep on a branch.

Had quite the wake up call the next morning. Adder purred in amusement at his own thoughts.

The young tabby tom's ears caught the sound of moving water. Immediately he bounded towards the noise and was relieved to see a creek running through the edge of the trees, on the other side a vast moor awaited him.

Adder gasped quietly, "WindClan territory. That *must* be it!"

His mother had described the territory perfectly. Grass and rocks as far as he could see, the wind through his fur made him feel more alive and free than he'd ever been. The creek ran right through it, creating a glimmering trail for him to follow.

Adder took a moment to sit on the bank and lap up a good amount of the cold water. It was so refreshing in fact, that he decided to wade his paws in it, cooling himself down from the blistering heat he felt from his traveling.

After he was finished he leaped out of the creek and onto the opposite bank. He followed the flowing water for a long while until a threatening yowl came from the top of a hill at the left of him. Adder's fur stood on end and his excitement soon turned into nervousness.

"Trespasser! What are you doing on our territory?" a white tom ran over swiftly and hissed in his face, claws unsheathed and ready for a fight. A black and white she-cat followed close behind, looking just as infuriated.

"I....I was just looking for WindClan! I'm not wanting to fight any of you!" Adder's ears pinned back, his green eyes were wide with fear.

They're going to kill me without a second thought. This was a bad idea. Why did I think I could just walk right onto their territory without any consequences? Fox dung! I didn't even smell their border, I was so distracted.

"And *why* were you looking for us? You're not a Clan cat. Are you some sort of rogue spy?" the she-cat spat.

"N-no! Not at all I just wanted to--"

"Wanted to steal our prey then? Well you can't have any of it. Get out of here before I tear your ears off" the white tom flexed his claws in and out of the ground.

Just as Adder was sure he was going to get pounced on and torn apart by these two cats, a third cat ran over and stood in between him and the others.

"Enough! What do you two think you're doing?" the spotted golden she-cat meowed sternly, her eyes narrowed into slits.

The black and white she-cat spoke first, clearly still in surprise that she had stopped them from attacking Adder.

"He's a rogue trespassing on our territory. Me and Embermask were just trying to defend our borders, Palespeck"

Palespeck let out an exasperated breath, "And WindClan is grateful

to have protective warriors such as yourself Badgerfur, but we give chances for the rogues to *run off* before we use our claws"

Adder shifted his paws uncomfortably. He felt more at ease to ask his questions with Palespeck here, but he was still embarrassed for not being able to get the words out when Badgerfur and Embermask were confronting him.

"As for you..." Palespeck turned towards Adder and tilted her head curiously, "Just what are you doing on our territory? You're still fairly young to be wandering around alone"

Adder's chest puffed out in protest, "I'm not that young! I've been hunting for myself for moons now!"

Palespeck let out a mrow of amusement and she gave her paw a few licks.

"I came here to ask to join WindClan" Adder blurted out and swished his tail around confidently.

The she-cat paused her licks and set her paw back on the ground slowly, "You want to join? That's something you don't hear every day"

Badgerfur and Embermask exchanged confused glances before Embermask grumbled.

"You really think we need a *rogue* in WindClan? We have a bit more integrity than that"

"It's not for any of us to decide Embermask" Palespeck shot the tom a disapproving glance, "You can come with us...erm--"

"Adder. My name is Adder" he replied quietly.

"Adder...you can come with us back to our camp. Our leader Heronstar will decide if he wants to accept you into the clan or not" Palespeck gestured with her tail for him to follow her and the other warriors.

The young tom bounded after them, filled with pure exhilaration.

This is it. Today I might become a real Clan cat.

Chapter 2

The WindClan camp was surprisingly well protected against weather considering the rest of their territory was far from sheltered. The camp was settled in a small patch of pine trees, while heather bushes and rocks surrounded it.

As soon as Adder stepped into the entrance of the camp he was greeted by stares of confusion and disgust. Whispers erupted among the clan members as Palespeck padded towards a large stone and upon closer examination, she was leading him into a den *beneath* the stone.

"Heronstar, I must speak with you" Palespeck called into the den.

A small gray tom peeked his head out from the darkness, obviously taken aback at the sight of Adder.

"Who is this Palespeck?" The tom's voice was a deep rumble.

Not the voice I expected from such a small cat.

"That's what I needed to speak with you about. You see, Adder wants to join our clan. I told him he needed to gain your permission first" she bowed her head respectfully at her leader.

Heronstar turned his blue gaze back to Adder, "You wish to join WindClan hm? You look a little over apprentice age. Are there any other rogues with you?"

Adder shook his head and nervously swallowed the lump in his throat.

"No Heronstar, I've been alone for a while now. I've heard about the clans ever since I was a kit. I want nothing more than to join and prove my worth as a warrior"

Heronstar's whiskers twitched at Adder's words and a slight purr

thundered from his chest, "Determination. That's a very good trait to have Adder"

Adder's nerves began to diminish at Heronstar's relaxed tone.

He doesn't hate me then. But what if he doesn't let me join despite all that? No. Stop that Adder! Don't assume the worst until he's said something.

The gray tom continued to stare him down, "Very well Adder. You may join our clan. We're in need of more warriors"

Adder's breath stuttered for a moment and his green eyes widened in shock.

He said yes! You're going to be a WindClan warrior, don't just sit in silence like a mouse-brain!

"T-thank you Heronstar. I won't let you down, I promise"

Heronstar nodded his head briefly and climbed up to the top stone.

"Let all cats of the moor, gather beneath the Sky Stone for a Clan meeting!" Heronstar's voice echoed across the camp.

Adder observed as warriors started sitting under the stone, looking up at their leader in anticipation. Even two tiny kits stumbled over their own paws to join in on the meeting.

"Frostkit, Pebblekit. Stay still and behave yourselves" their mother, a brown she cat with white speckles, scolded gently as she curled her tail around her paws.

"It's probably about that rogue Palespeck brought into camp" a young silver dappled she-cat meowed in a whisper over to a long haired tom with ginger patches.

"I can't believe she didn't just run him off" the tom murmured.

Heronstar cut off the whispers of his clanmates as he started his announcement.

"As we all know, these past four moons have been rough on us. So many of our best warriors have lost their lives, as well as some of our respected elders" he glanced down at his paws as he spoke.

I knew Clan life was merciless, but Heronstar makes it sound like none of these deaths should've happened so quickly. Strange.

"That is why I have accepted Adder's offer of him wanting to join WindClan. He will train with our apprentices and be made a warrior just as any normal clan cat would"

Yowls of protest erupted from the crowd when they took a moment to let Heronstar's words sink in.

"You're letting a rogue *join us?!"*

"We're no better than ThunderClan now!"

"We can't trust outsiders if our clanmates are dying!"

"We can just have more kits if we need more warriors! Run him off!"

Heronstar growled loudly, "Silence!" the yowls slowly died down and instead grew into hushed whispers.

"I understand your concern. If Adder does anything to break the Warrior Code I'll immediately tell him to leave" he sighed and looked over at Adder, "Adder, step forward please"

Adder took shaky steps towards the leader, he was terrified now. He wasn't expecting this reaction from the Clan. Everyone seemed to be completely against him except the leader and the deputy.

Don't they want *new warriors?*

"Adder, from this day on until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Adderpaw" Heronstar meowed and touched noses with the newly appointed apprentice.

"Jaytuft, you're finally ready to take on your first apprentice. You had an fine mentor in Cloudshine. Though she has joined StarClan, I hope you will pass on the lessons you were taught to Adderpaw"

A long haired, gray tortoiseshell tom padded up to Adderpaw and he gave a respectful lap of his tongue to his forehead, "Don't mind the others. I'm glad you joined and even more glad to be your mentor"

Adderpaw let out a purr of delight at his mentor's words.

Jaytuft was a good choice. Heronstar knew the right warrior to train me, maybe this won't be as bad as I thought.

Chapter 3

After the apprentice ceremony was finished, the clan disbanded to their dens and to the fresh kill pile that was located near the base of a pine tree. Adderpaw felt a twist in his stomach whenever a pair of eyes would lock onto him, or when cats would whisper to their nearby clanmates, not being subtle with who they were gossiping about.

He was so lost in his own paranoid thoughts, that he hardly heard Jaytuft's informative mews. His new mentor had taken the time to show him around the camp. Though Adderpaw was excited to learn about his new home, he still didn't feel welcome.

They'll get used to me in time I'm sure. I'll prove that I'm just as useful as a Clanborn cat...then they'll see.

Adderpaw raised his head confidently and strode across to a large burrow on the side of the camp walls. His pale green eyes widened in amazement.

"Wow! How can cats even sleep in here without worrying about it collapsing?" Adderpaw turned to his mentor.

Jaytuft flicked his fluffy tail, his whiskers twitching in amusement.

"The den looks like its all dirt on the outside. On the inside it's all stone walls with ground flooring. It's perfectly stable" the tortoiseshell tom gestured Adderpaw onwards to the apprentice den.

The apprentice den was much different than the warriors den, instead of a burrow it was under the shelter of a pine tree and a large jutting rock. A few heather bushes surrounded it, forming the walls of the den.

"This is where you'll be staying until you become a warrior" Jaytuft looked down at Adderpaw, "We have two other apprentices in the

Clan, Robinpaw and Hollypaw. You'll meet them tonight at the latest"

Adderpaw glanced down at a pebble on the ground and pawed it around slightly, "Do you think they'll get used to me being around?"

Jaytuft's green eyes softened at the young cat and he let out a sigh, "It's hard telling. Don't worry yourself over what other cats think of you Adderpaw. You were brave to even step a paw onto our territory, let alone join our clan. You need to focus on *yourself* "

Focus on myself..

Adderpaw found that difficult to do. When his mother had come down with the sickness that eventually took her life, Adderpaw was right there beside her. Helping her even if it meant risking the chance of him becoming ill too. His mind reflected back on the times he would also help catch prey for starving rogues from time to time if they allowed him to do so.

Doesn't being in a Clan require me to be selfless? I need to take other cat's thoughts into consideration. I understand what Jaytuft is saying of course, but where do I draw the line in between what words I think about and which I ignore?

A small she-cat, not much bigger than Adderpaw walked over to him and Jaytuft. She had sleek silver fur and white patches, with piercing ice blue eyes.

"Hello Silveroak. Adderpaw, this is Silveroak. Our medicine cat" Jaytuft greeted the she-cat and bowed his head in respect. Adderpaw quickly copied his mentor and a chuckle escaped Silveroak's throat.

"No need to be so formal. So this is our brand new apprentice? It's nice to meet you Adderpaw. Has your mentor explained what a medicine cat is to you yet?" she tilted her head curiously.

Adderpaw shook his head and pricked his ears up, "Whatever it is, it sounds important"

Silveroak gave a proud purr, "It is indeed, young one. A medicine cat works with different herbs to treat sick or injured cats. We also are the ones who receive guidance from StarClan"

Jaytuft immediately started giving his chest a few embarrassed licks, "I haven't told him about Starclan yet. Perhaps you're the best one to explain it to him, I need to go check on Starlingwing and the kits"

So those kits and that she-cat that were watching my apprentice ceremony are Jaytuft's family.

"Go on, no one is stopping you" Silveroak mewed and watched the tom pad off to the nursery.

"Heronstar picked that furball as your mentor? Good luck with that. I don't know how he manages to do his patrols and still have all this time to play with those bouncing rabbits he calls his kits" she muttered in mock irritation.

"Now, let me tell you about StarClan. StarClan are our ancestors, when a Clan cat dies their bodies stay with us, but their soul joins Silverpelt. The thick band of stars you can see at night" Silveroak turned her head up towards the darkening sky.

"Every single one of those stars is a cat from any of the four Clans. We honor them even when they have left us"

Adderpaw looked at the sky too. The stars wouldn't be visible tonight however, clouds were rolling in. Thankfully not storm clouds.

I wonder if my mother is up there. Would she be proud of me? Proud that I found WindClan on my own?

"Do you have anyone you know that's in StarClan?"

Silveroak went quiet and she solemnly lowered her gaze from the sky, "Oh yes, I know plenty"

"I've seen many tragedies in my time as a medicine cat Adderpaw. It's a fulfilling duty to my Clan but I suppose it's, in the end, very

lonely and strenuous"

The dusty brown tabby tom nodded in agreement. He couldn't imagine how Silveroak must feel.

She's many seasons older than me. She hasn't mentioned that any cats help her out with her duties. Has she really done all of this by herself? I think I'd go crazy with all that responsibility in my paws!

"I think I'll leave you to rest now Adderpaw... welcome to WindClan" she purred happily to him and walked over to Heronstar who was sitting outside his den munching on a meadowlark.

Adderpaw took a deep breath and stepped into the apprentice den. He avoided the nests with a strong scent of the apprentices Jaytuft mentioned and settled down in one. The nests were lined with soft pieces of moss, grass, and some feathers most likely gathered from prey.

His tail curled up near his nose and he slowly drifted off into a warm and comforting sleep.

Chapter 4

A strong paw jabbed at Adderpaw's side, startling him awake. When he'd blinked away the fogginess of sleep his gaze met a pair of blue-purple eyes that belonged to a long haired tom around his own age.

"Get up, *rogue*..." the tom growled disapprovingly at him.

Adderpaw stretched up into a sitting position and tilted his head to the side at his denmate's hostile behavior.

The best thing I can do is just brush it off. Don't want to deal with any arguments this early.

"What is it? Why are you waking me up...whoever you are?"

The young tom puffed his chest out, as if he was offended that Adderpaw didn't know who he was. *High and mighty already*. Adderpaw wondered what he might turn out to be like when he was an older warrior. Would he still possess the same amount of pride?

"My name is Robinpaw, and you're the rogue that joined the Clan yesterday. Not that we needed you, we have plenty of strong warriors!"

Robinpaw. Right. Jaytuft told me both of the other apprentice's names yesterday. Maybe I should've paid closer attention.

Robinpaw's words stung, making him shift his paws against the moss of his nest meekly. Not that what he said was completely true, Heronstar had mentioned the greater number of deaths in Windclan.

Cats around here just seem to be prejudice against the simple fact I wasn't born on the moor with them. What a mouse-brained thought. I can hunt and fight just as well as them!

"Palespeck wants you and Jaytuft on dawn patrol, so get your tail up out of your nest and leave" Robinpaw sneered and flopped down in his own nest, flexing his claws against a clump of feathers.

Adderpaw stayed silent, still ignoring Robinpaw's sharp tone, and he padded out of the apprentice den to join his mentor at the entrance of camp. He let out a yawn and looked up at the gray tom questioningly.

The older warrior's green eyes met with Adderpaw's blankly for a moment before he mrowed in embarassment.

"Oh, I didn't quite tell you about patrols did I Adderpaw?"

Adderpaw shook his head and replied tiredly, "Not that I can remember"

"Well you see Adderpaw, there's four Clans around here and we need to make patrols to check our borders and hunt--"

Jaytuft stopped his explanation and turned his head when a brown tabby tom and a reddish tabby tom started walking out of camp. The brown tabby tom turned his head and rolled his pale yellow eyes at the tortoiseshell tom.

"Jaytuft, hurry up before we leave you and the rogue here"

Jaytuft's tail bristled slightly as he padded closer to the two other warriors with Adderpaw following right behind.

"You should be more welcoming to my apprentice Pineblaze" Jaytuft warned.

"I don't see the point in welcoming him until he makes a noticeable difference in our Clan. For now he's just another mouth to feed" Pineblaze meowed and narrowed his eyes. He leaped onto a large pile of rocks, looking out over the moor.

Jaytuft glanced back at Adderpaw apologetically before leaping onto one of the rocks himself.

He's not arguing anymore because he knows Pineblaze is right. I'm a

burden to the Clan until I prove I can care for it. Maybe I'll catch some prey on this patrol and bring it back. That would be a start to show them I'm not worthless!

"This is a great chance for you to learn the different Clan borders and territories, Adderpaw. Pay close attention to your surrounding scents" Jaytuft meowed.

Adderpaw closed his eyes and breathed in the cool, morning air. At first all he could smell was the grass and the scents of his fellow clanmates. A light breeze picked up and his white-tipped ears pricked up immediately when he caught a brand new scent.

"I smell pine sap and oak leaves!" he blurted out and beamed at his mentor proudly.

Pineblaze was the one to speak up first, not even turning his head toward Adderpaw as they continued along the border, "That would be ShadowClan territory. A bunch of snake-hearts is what they are. Dare I say they're nearly *rogues*. A fitting scent for you to point out I suppose"

Adderpaw's muscles tensed up at how cold the brown tabby was trying to be. He wasn't subtle about it, but it wasn't too aggressive either. The young tom was starting to feel sick to his stomach again.

ShadowClan. Why does Pineblaze think they're snake-hearts? I haven't heard of them until now. If it's a Clan don't they live by the same rules?

He felt a slight pang of sympathy for the other Clan.

They're more than likely doing the best they can. If they aren't, it could be bad leadership. No innocent cat deserves to be treated like dirt just because of where they're from.

"Pineblaze you're a senior warrior. Act like one" the reddish brown tabby tom chimed in and lashed his tail irritably.

"I'm ashamed to be you littermate right now. Jaytuft is right; Adderpaw should at least be given a chance to be respected. If you don't like patrolling with him you can go back to camp"

Jaytuft let out a sigh of relief and mumbled a thank you to the other warrior as Pineblaze pinned his ears back in shame that his brother had to snap him out of it.

"Fine. Sorry Redstripe" Pineblaze strolled ahead of the group and sniffed at the air near the creek that ran through the meadow and into a forest of oak trees. Adderpaw listened closely, the sound of a much larger rushing of water filled his ears.

"The creek runs into a nearby river. That's where RiverClan territory is, obviously" his mentor looked down at the stream of water nearby them.

"I much prefer the creek, we only go to the river if our water is dried up on the moor. We're lucky that hasn't happened yet this Greenleaf"

"Jaytuft is just afraid of getting his precious fur wet" Redstripe purred in amusement and curled his tail under the gray tortoiseshell's nose. Jaytuft sneezed and glared up playfully at the senior warrior.

"At least I'm not afraid of gophers" Jaytuft shot back and swiped at Redstripe's tail.

"It was *one* time Jaytuft! I didn't see it and it startled me!"

I never knew older cats could act like a couple of kits. Adderpaw thought as he kept following the three warriors. Something nagged at the back of his mind like claws, he started to ponder the thought while Jaytuft and Redstripe continued teasing each other. Pineblaze led the patrol in complete silence after Redstripe had scolded him.

Nobody said anything bad about RiverClan. Yet ShadowClan are considered to be rogues? Something seems wrong with that state of mind. How can one Clan be worse than another? Maybe I should ask Jaytuft about it if we ever have time alone.

Adderpaw's paw pads ached by the time they had reached camp again. He didn't realize how large of a territory WindClan had until he walked the border. *Do other Clans have that much territory as well?*

No wonder the Clans are considered to be intimidating!

He dragged himself over to the fresh kill pile and picked up a vole in his jaws and carried it over near the apprentice den. Adderpaw settled down and took a bite of the vole, it still had warmth to it despite it being on the pile since dawn.

Adderpaw licked his lips after he swallowed down another bite of it. As he was in the middle of eating he felt a light pressure on his tail, he turned his head to look behind his shoulder and his gaze landed on a pure white tom kit with light brown front paws.

The kit squeaked in surprise when he realized Adderpaw had spotted him.

"Pebblekit, you said he wouldn't feel it!" he protested and gave his sister a grumpy expression.

"I didn't say stand out in the open while you did it bee-brain!" Pebblekit mewed and bounced onto Adderpaw's back.

"Our dad says you're his apprentice! Me and Frostkit haven't ever seen a rogue before. Do you eat twoleg food like Streamheart said?" the mottled brown she-kit questioned.

Pebblekit and Frostkit. Jaytuft's kits. At least they're not afraid of me. I'm sure if they were anyone else's kits their mother would keep them far away from me.

"Twoleg food? No I've always eaten mice and whatever other prey me and my mother could find" Adderpaw grunted lightly when Frostkit joined his sister on his back. They definitely weren't too young judging by their weight and size. He'd say they were around four or five moons old.

"Where's your mother now? Doesn't she miss you now that you've joined our Clan?" Frostkit continued to bat his paws at Adderpaw's tail.

At the mention of his mother, Adderpaw grew quiet. He hadn't thought about his mother's death since he stopped grieving. Not that it was terribly painful for him to speak about, his mother

wasn't the sanest of all cats. When she got that sickness it had made her mind even worse. It was for the best that she had passed away, even though it caused Adderpaw to be alone for longer than he had wanted.

"She's in StarClan"

Or at least I hope she found her way there...

Chapter 5

After Adderpaw's stomach was full and the kits had scrambled back into the nursery to rest; he was led by Jaytuft to train in the sand pit next to the camp. The feeling of the earth moving beneath his paws with every step he took made Adderpaw a little anxious.

How am I supposed to train when I can't even grip the ground with my claws*?*

Suddenly, a silver she-cat with dappled fur leaped into the sand pit carelessly. Behind her, the Windclan deputy followed and stepped into the sand pit with focused grace. Jaytuft padded over to the two while Adderpaw stood unmoving.

"Good, you and Hollypaw are joining us. I needed Adderpaw to spar with someone his size" he said as both Palespeck and Hollypaw glanced over at the brown tabby.

"Are you sure he'll be able to train with me? He looks like he can't even step forward properly" Hollypaw chuffed.

Adderpaw's pelt prickled with embarrassment and he lowered his head. It was his first time meeting the other apprentice and he looked like a kit struggling to walk.

She must already think I'm a mouse-brain!

Hollypaw padded over to Adderpaw and pricked her ears up, not showing any signs that she was going to be hostile. She circled the tabby tom and hopped up onto a stone that was located in the middle of the sand pit.

"You just need to lift your legs higher is all. Slide your paws across the ground when you land so you have control of your own movement" the dappled she-cat explained and she lapped her

tongue over her paw, drawing it back over her ear to clean it.

"Don't worry, it's hard for every new apprentice in WindClan. We like to work on balance; it helps us when we run during hunting or a battle"

Adderpaw's pale green eyes blinked in shock at his denmate's words and he slowly nodded in understanding once it had faded away enough to process a reaction.

She's actually trying to help me...I wasn't expecting this kindness at all! Especially after speaking with Robinpaw this morning. I suppose some cats aren't going to get used to me for a long time. Maybe not ever...

He did just as Hollypaw instructed and eventually he was able to maneuver around the sand without any hesitation. Hollypaw meowed in encouragement, "There you go! Now Jaytuft can teach you some battle stances before we spar"

The gray tortoiseshell tom dipped his head gratefully at Hollypaw and stepped in front of Adderpaw, "Are you ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be" he gave his shoulder a few nervous licks.

Battle training had worked out better than Adderpaw expected. Jaytuft taught him the basics and let him practice on Hollypaw. Palespeck and Jaytuft observed the two while sitting on the rock, chatting quietly among themselves.

The silver dappled she-cat leaped over Adderpaw and swiftly turned to swipe at his flank. Adderpaw whipped his head around and kicked his hind legs into Hollypaw's chest, knocking the breath out of her for a few moments. He had just enough time to turn and knock her to the ground before she regained normal breathing.

Adderpaw stood on her chest and raised his head in victory as he swiped his paw over her neck, indicating a killing strike. Hollypaw closed her eyes and stuck her tongue out playfully.

"Oh my Starclan. I have been defeated by a rogue!" she teased, purring softly as she opened her dark blue eyes.

Though he knew the silver she-cat was only teasing him, being called a rogue made his stomach instantly clench in defiance.

It makes me feel like no matter how hard I try, cats will never see me as a Windclan warrior.

Palespeck was the first to walk over to them, "I'm impressed Adderpaw, your first day of battle training went smoothly"

Adderpaw stepped away from Hollypaw to let her up and his chest fur puffed up in pride.

I did it! I proved that I can fight!

"However. I believe Jaytuft needs to teach you about the Warrior Code" the golden-brown she-cat meowed in a serious tone, her yellow eyes slightly narrowing.

"An honorable warrior doesn't need to kill other cats in battle unless necessary for self defense"

Adderpaw's muscles tensed at the deputy's words and he lowered his head.

That's right. If it were a real fight I'd have been in with Hollypaw, I would've killed *her with a blow to the throat like that. I thought that's what Clan cats did!*

"Sorry Adderpaw...I should've told you before we started training. It's not your fault, being a rogue must have been a hard life to live when you're trying to protect yourself alone" Jaytuft chimed in and jumped out of the sand pit.

Palespeck nodded in agreement, "Luckily you're Jaytuft's *first* apprentice. I'll only let him off with a warning at his mentoring mistakes. If he were a more experienced warrior it would be different" the golden she-cat joined Jaytuft's side and Hollypaw bounded over to him; her blue eyes shining with admiration.

"I thought you did amazing despite that, Adderpaw. I just know you'll make a great warrior regardless of formerly being a rogue"

Adderpaw's chest filled with warmth at Hollypaw's words. The tense feeling in his stomach seemingly melted away. And for the first time since he joined WindClan he felt *relaxed*.

"Thank you, Hollypaw" he murmured as he followed his mentor and deputy back to camp, Hollypaw contently walking by his side.

Chapter 6

A Half-moon passed since Adderpaw had joined WindClan. Greenleaf was slowly transitioning into Leaf-fall; the sun losing the fiery heat it had once brought upon everything and everyone. And the prey had dwindled significantly as there became less water on the moor.

Adderpaw had agreed to go on a sundown border patrol with Jaytuft, Hollypaw, Badgerfur and Palespeck. His muzzle was lowered to the ground in case he noticed anything different about the scents.

He turned his head to glance down at the nearly empty creek, a spike of worry struck his chest. It was a long walk to the main river. If the Clan desperately needed water they'd have a difficult time carrying it back to camp even if they found moss.

"Pick up the pace Adderpaw!" Hollypaw called back to him, snapping Adderpaw out of his paranoid thoughts.

He trotted closer to the group, enjoying the feeling of cold earth beneath his paws.

Much more pleasant than burning them on hot stones during training! Adderpaw thought back to the day Robinpaw had challenged him to spar on the sun-heated rocks with him. First one to jump off had to clean out the elders den.

Adderpaw had lost. Silveroak had to soothe his paw pads after it, while Robinpaw simply brushed off the pain.

And he made it his sole mission to gloat for days after that too. Annoying furball.

Suddenly, a thick rotting stench filled his nostrils and Adderpaw clenched his jaw tightly to keep himself from gagging.

"What in Starclan's name is *that*? It smells worse than Dirtplace!" Hollypaw meowed in complaint and batted her paw against her nose to cover it up. Adderpaw looked at the three warriors ahead of him, expecting them to answer, but there was only complete silence.

Palespeck exchanged glances with everyone and she stepped towards a thicket of heather bushes near the ShadowClan border. Adderpaw felt a wave of dread wash over his entire body and he followed his deputy.

The golden spotted she-cat gasped in horror when she drew the bushes back with her paw. Adderpaw peeked in and instantly regretted it when his eyes set on the corpse of a WindClan warrior. Ice seemed to flow in his veins as he stood there frozen with shock; and his stomach bile was threatening to jump out of his throat.

"Thrushspirit?!" Badgerfur yowled, grief shaking her voice. She pushed through Palespeck and carefully dragged the tom's body out from the bushes, setting him down as she buried her face against his matted brown-gray fur. And a wail of sorrow erupted from her when Palespeck joined her side and brushed her tail over Badgerfur's flank.

I've never seen Badgerfur like this before. She's usually so cold and distant from everyone else. She really did love Thrushspirit, I think they even planned on having kits.

The stench from Thrushspirit's body was hard to ignore, but he took the time to examine the warrior. His fur bristled at his discovery and he turned to Hollypaw, "There's no wounds. How exactly did he die if he wasn't killed?"

Adderpaw was too caught up in his own shock previously to see Hollypaw's reaction to the situation. Her whole body was quivering

and her claws slid in and out of the grass below her paws. His eyes quickly softened and he whispered to her, "Hollypaw..it's okay-"

"How is any of this okay to you Adderpaw? We just found one of our warriors *dead*. Near *ShadowClan* border" Hollypaw shakily growled in response.

"But that's what I'm trying to *tell* you, there's no visible wounds on him. So he couldn't have been killed on purpose right?"

"ShadowClan may be snake-hearted brutes but they're clever" Badgerfur spoke up in a hiss and glared over at ShadowClan territory, "If they killed Thrushspirit I'll make sure they pay dearly for it!"

"Perhaps you rabbit-eaters could give us a proper explanation before you make the mistake of attacking us?" a new voice joined in. Adderpaw whipped around and came face to face with a broad shouldered blue-gray tom.

A ShadowClan warrior! Defend your ground Adderpaw, this is your chance to prove you're useful.

"Well *perhaps* you should take a step back into your own territory first" he spat back and pinned his ears back against his head threateningly. The blue-gray tom stared at him for a moment before mrowing in amusement.

"WindClan is sending their apprentices to scare off ShadowClan warriors? How adorable" regardless of his tone, he stepped back into his territory and moved his gaze to Thrushspirit's body, "Now will someone explain what happened?"

"One of you ShadowClan pieces of crowfood killed my *mate* that's what happened!" Badgerfur snarled and started to storm towards the ShadowClan warrior. Palespeck leaped in front of her and carefully pushed her chest back with a paw.

"Badgerfur, enough of this. We aren't sure if it was ShadowClan. Like Adderpaw said, Thrushspirit doesn't have any open wounds on him. We need proof before we accuse anyone"

Palespeck always being the voice of reason in WindClan. She'll make a great leader one day.

Two more ShadowClan cats emerged from the shelter of the pine trees to join the other tom. A pale brown and silver she-cat and a dark blue-gray tom with a scarred pelt. The older tom was the first to speak up, his amber eyes were narrowed.

"Why is WindClan so close to our borders Thistlejaw? What are you waiting for? Run them off!" he yowled angrily.

"Aspenshade. We're not trying to be hostile here, we were out patrolling our borders and we came across a corpse of one of our fellow warriors. Some silence and respect would be appreciated at this time" Palespeck calmly explained and helped Jaytuft pick up Thrushspirit's body.

"Let's go back to camp, everyone"

Adderpaw nodded and took one last look at Thistlejaw, the blue-gray warrior looked far less threatening now. His head was lowered and he looked as if he wanted to run and hide for the rest of the night.

Reminds me of a frightened scolded kit. Aspenshade looks like he could be his father too.

He padded away quickly from the border to check to see if Hollypaw's nerves had toned down from their conversation before Thistlejaw had shown up, but he was only greeted by eerie quietness. The whole moor seemed to know of Thrushspirit's death; he couldn't hear any chirping crickets or birds settling in trees to go to sleep for the night.

The feeling of dread still hung over Adderpaw like a looming shadow. The sight of Thrushspirit's stiff corpse with round glassy eyes didn't help either.

Something isn't right about any of this. How did he die? Why did he die so far away from camp when he wasn't injured? StarClan help us figure this out...

Chapter 7

As soon as they had wandered slowly into camp, heads started turning, for those who were still wide awake at least. Gasps of confusion and surprise spread around the clearing and Silveroak quickly bounded over to them.

"What happened?" her icy blue eyes were wide in dismay, desperately searching everyone's gaze until one of them explained. Badgerfur stared at the ground and she whispered while trying her best to hide the hopelessness in her voice.

"We found Thrushspirit's body near the ShadowClan border..I can't believe...I never thought-"

Silveroak rested her muzzle on top of Badgerfur's head in understanding, "I know Badgerfur. Please go to my den and Embermask can give you poppy seeds so you can calm down for tonight"

Badgerfur nodded meekly and was helped along to Silveroak's den by Embermask. He meowed words of comfort to her as they walked. More cats cautiously wandered out of their dens to see what was going on.

Adderpaw watched as Silveroak examined Thrushspirit's corpse, his whiskers twitched impatiently and he blurted out before she had a chance to speak, "He didn't die from fighting anyone, there's no wounds on him"

Silveroak shifted her gaze toward him, "You're correct in that observation Adderpaw. I've only ever heard it happen to elders, but it's possible his heart stopped" she rested a paw on Thrushspirit's shoulder and leaned down to sniff at his muzzle.

"But he was coughing up blood before his death. He had internal

bleeding"

Adderpaw tilted his head in curiosity, "Why would Thrushspirit have internal bleeding? He seemed perfectly healthy yesterday"

"He might've eaten a bad mouse or he could have injured himself without knowing how serious it was" Silveroak sighed gloomily and turned to Adderpaw when she stood up, "Could you go fetch rosemary from my den Adderpaw? It has needle-like leaves and purple flowers, it's difficult to miss"

Adderpaw hesitated for a brief moment. *I'm not a medicine cat apprentice, surely a warrior could do this for her!* He pushed the thought away regardless, heading into the medicine den. *Quit it Adderpaw. A fellow warrior in your Clan has died under circumstances even the medicine cat can't give a clear answer to. You need to help no matter how you feel.*

The scent of herbs mixing together in one den made Adderpaw feel slightly nauseous. His head was even *aching* taking in all the new smells. Badgerfur laid in a moss and feather filled nest with Embermask sitting beside her.

"Is she okay?" Adderpaw's ears folded back in concern for the she-cat. She looked so ill from all of this, almost as if she were slowly dying right in front of his eyes. *Can cats die from heartbreak?*

Embermask stared at Badgerfur's sleeping body and his tail fur was bristled up in distress, "I don't know. She loved Thrushspirit with all her heart. He helped her be more confident. They were going to have a family, and all that was ripped away from her tonight"

Adderpaw's chest felt tight and heavy in sympathy for the black and white she-cat. He hoped one day if he ever had a mate, he'd be able to stay with them until they were old and cranky in the elders den.

StarClan waits for no cat. It doesn't matter if you or your loved ones are ready. Death is cruel but a necessary part in life. Which is why cats should appreciate it while they're still alive. Live with no regrets, that's how I want to live.

"At least she has you, Embermask. She knows you care about her too. And she's lucky to have you as a friend in times like this"

This was the first time he had really spoken to Embermask, most of time the white and ginger warrior hardly acknowledged Adderpaw's existence. More than likely he was still wary of Adderpaw's rogue upbringing; he wouldn't be the only one in WindClan with that mindset.

"She's a strong warrior in muscle and in mind. I'm sure she'll be alright" Adderpaw mewed and searched Silveroak's storage shelves for rosemary. He soon spotted the prickly looking leaves and the bright purplish-blue flowers.

He took some in his jaws and prayed to StarClan that the taste wasn't foul. To his surprise it wasn't as bad as he thought, tasted almost like pine needles. Adderpaw approached the den entrance, but was stopped by a soft meow that came from Embermask.

"Thank you Adderpaw"

When Adderpaw delivered the rosemary to Silveroak she placed parts of the fragment herb in his pelt and the rest around his body. Heronstar strode over and looked around at his grieving clanmates.

"Tonight we share tongues with Thrushspirit one last time. He was a noble warrior, loving to his mate and his clanmates. May you find peace and plenty of prey in StarClan"

Murmurs of agreement rose among the clearing and the small, light gray tom rested his forehead against Thrushspirit's neck. Adderpaw watched warriors took turns sharing tongues with the former WindClan warrior. He felt awkward that he wasn't able to do so, he didn't know Thrushspirit personally and sharing tongues with a dead Clan member was a reserved event for ones who knew him and respected his accomplishments.

Silveroak took the spot beside Adderpaw and her kind icy blue eyes stared into his, "May I ask a rather selfish favor of you Adderpaw?"

Adderpaw's pale green eyes blinked in confusion. What could the

medicine cat want from him? And asking for a favor out of nowhere? Anxiety threatened to fill Adderpaw's mind.

"U-uhm, yeah..sure Silveroak. What is it?"

The white-patched silver she-cat looked just as nervous to ask Adderpaw her favor as Adderpaw felt nervous to know. She looked towards the sky, the stars were twinkling above. Adderpaw followed her gaze.

"I have no apprentice of my own Adderpaw. None of the kits are showing interest and I'm not sure how much time I'll have left until I join StarClan...every death seems so random these days. I was hoping I could train you" Silveroak finally replied.

Adderpaw's heart started to race at the medicine cat's words. His jaw was opened in utter astonishment. This wasn't what he was expecting to hear at all.

No. No *I can't be a medicine cat! I came here to be a warrior! I understand her concerns but she can't want me to be trained as one. I'm....I'm...*

"I used to be a rogue! Nobody in WindClan is going to want the cat closest to their warrior ancestors to be a former rogue!" he exclaimed quietly and dug his claws into the ground. He didn't want to disturb Thrushspirit's vigil with his problems.

"I understand that Adderpaw. You'd still get to be a warrior, I'm not even forcing you to accept my offer. It's your choice. I just need to know someone can take my position if I die unexpectedly" she spoke gently and looked back at the brown tabby.

Adderpaw shifted uncomfortably as he listened to Silveroak's words. Had she discussed this with Heronstar before she asked him? Or was she just curious to know if I was interested? Was it even possible to be both a warrior and medicine cat apprentice?

Silveroak must be so frightened from all the deaths that she doesn't want to risk the Clan being without a medicine cat. So frightened that she'd even let me *train as one.*

She did say it *wasn't* required for him to stop his warrior training. If he got knowledge a medicine cat only knew along with his warrior skills...

I could be one of the best warriors ever! I'd know about hunting, fighting and *healing! How cool would that be? Though, it would be stressful too. Oh great StarClan I don't know what I'm going to do..*

"L-Let me think about it?" he murmured apprehensively.

"Of course Adderpaw. Take your time" Silveroak stepped towards Thrushspirit's body and began sharing tongues with him.

Adderpaw slipped away to the apprentice den, not bothering to eat, even though his stomach was growling to be filled with prey. His anxiety weighed him down too much he could hardly *look* at the fresh-kill pile. He curled up in his nest and attempted to relax his mind enough to fall asleep.

Needless to say his sleep was everything but relaxing that night.

Chapter 8

Blood seeped down Thistlejaw's neck, staining his blue-gray fur black. He stumbled forward and choked on his words but nothing came out except a gargling noise and more blood bubbling from his fresh wound.

His yellow eyes strained to look up at a shadowy figure with fiery amber eyes. The cat raised it's massive paw and struck Thistlejaw's chest. The amount of force was enough to send Thistlejaw flying into the freezing river behind him.

Thistlejaw flailed helplessly in the dark depths of the currents, his blood leaving a trail in the water. Despite his legs thrashing about he made no progress in swimming to safety.

I *can't swim to the surface! I'm sinking. I'm going to die! StarClan help me!*

His vision started to go blotchy and his lungs slowly filled with water. Then there was complete darkness.

"Thistlejaw, wake up!"

Thistlejaw jolted awake and gasped for air, panting desperately. He scanned around, finally realizing that he was safe and sound in the warriors den. The voice who had woken him came from a dark gray tabby she-cat with amber eyes.

Amber eyes. Just like the ones in my dream. Thistlejaw shuddered in fear at the thought.

"Great StarClan, Thistlejaw! Are you alright? That's the worst I've seen you after a nightmare" the concerned she-cat meowed.

Thistlejaw avoided eye contact with her and shamefully sat up in his nest. His fur was still ruffled up in terror and his mind was still processing that he was still alive.

It felt so real. How can a dream even begin to feel like that?

"I'm fine Ebonyfern. It was just a nightmare, nothing I can't get over" he replied in a monotone voice. He hated cats seeing the weakest sides of him, it wasn't normal for a ShadowClan warrior to be afraid of petty dreams.

We're the fiercest Clan in the forest. If anyone knew how scared out of my own pelt I still am from something that isn't real I'd be the spectacle of ShadowClan. Thistlejaw the frightened little mouse.

"Am I going on a patrol this morning?" he lapped his tongue against his paw and brought his paw over his ears and face to clean himself.

Ebonyfern shifted her paws nervously and took a closer step forward to Thistlejaw, "Look Thistlejaw. I know you hate talking about it, but maybe you should tell Tawnyclaw about these constant nightmares you keep having"

Thistlejaw's muscles tensed up as he kept cleaning his fur, "I told you I'm *fine* Ebonyfern. I don't need Tawnyclaw giving me any herbs"

"That's not really what I meant...you keep having these nightmares. What if StarClan is trying to give you a message?" Ebonyfern's whiskers twitched and her tail curled against his own.

Thistlejaw nearly busted out in laughter at Ebonyfern's theory. His ears flicked in amusement and he bit his tongue.

"StarClan coming to me when they could easily go to Tawnyclaw or Mintstar? Oh yes, I'm sure that's exactly what's happening"

Ebonyfern thwacked her paw against the back of his head, "I'm being serious Thistlejaw, cats don't just have nightmares every time they close their eyes. Either way, you should go talk to Tawnyclaw. I'm worried about you" her voice softened from her previous tenseness.

A long sigh escaped Thistlejaw's mouth and he nodded briefly, "Very well. I'll go see her today. But you shouldn't worry about me

Ebonyfern, you have your own life to worry about. Swiftflower's kits are becoming apprentices today"

The gray tabby she-cat purred happily, "And you think Mintstar will make me mentor one of those rambunctious furballs?"

"I wouldn't doubt it, you're a great warrior and you haven't had an apprentice yet!" he stood up and wandered out of the warriors den with Ebonyfern. She followed close behind and looked out over the ShadowClan camp.

"So you don't think she'll pick you to mentor one of them? You haven't had an apprentice either"

Thistlejaw paused to glance back at her. He hadn't thought about Mintstar assigning him an apprentice. He wasn't the best warrior in ShadowClan, surely she'd choose someone else over him. Like Marshfoot, he was a more experienced warrior.

Or even my own brother, Leopardwhisper. He'd be a good mentor if you look past his stubborn and cold personality.

"It's possible I guess, but I don't think I'm ready for an apprentice yet" he shrugged his broad shoulders. ShadowClan needed more apprentices though, their only apprentice right now was Crowpaw. And he's nearly finished with his training, Whirlsplash would give him his assessment in a moon or so.

A thick-furred gray she cat with darker paws strode across the camp and leaped from a rock to a low hanging pine branch. Her voice boomed with authority across the forest clearing.

"May all cats old enough to climb, gather beneath the High-Branch for a Clan meeting!"

Ebonyfern nudged Thistlejaw's side playfully with her shoulder, "Come on Thistlejaw, it's time for the apprentice ceremony" she bounded over to High-Branch and waited patiently for him to follow.

The blue-gray tom hesitated as his father Aspenshade glared over at him, making his neck fur stand on end. He went ahead and made

his way to sit by Ebonyfern carefully.

He's still angry at me for what happened at the WindClan border. But none of that was my fault! Mintstar wouldn't have approved if I attacked them. I'd probably be stuck with apprentice duties for punishment. I did the right thing, he can go eat crowfood.

"Cats of ShadowClan, we have three kits to be named apprentices today. Breezekit, Newtkit, and Fogkit. Please step forward" Mintstar announced, watching as the three kits scrambled onto the rock pile below the pine branch.

I remember my apprentice ceremony. Me and Leopardwhisper were shaking when we walked up to receive our names and mentors.

"Until you three have received your warrior names you will be known as Breezepaw, Newtpaw, and Fogpaw"

"Breezepaw!"

"Newtpaw!"

"Fogpaw!"

The Clan chanted out their names proudly, Thistlejaw included. This was the moment during his ceremony where he finally felt at home in ShadowClan. Being a kit you live without responsibilities or worries, as an apprentice you finally feel like you're a part of something bigger than yourself. That feeling only grows stronger when you become a warrior.

"Ebonyfern. You have shown your loyalty and your wits to ShadowClan, I hope that you will pass on your knowledge to Breezepaw?"

"I will Mintstar" Ebonyfern lifted her head and padded over to the young gray dappled she-cat, touching noses with her new apprentice.

"Dovedapple will you mentor Fogpaw? You have shown the Clan your strength and courage over the seasons, and I know you'll teach Fogpaw the same"

"Of course I will Mintstar" Dovedapple responded, walking to the gray tabby tom and touched noses with him as Ebonyfern did with Breezepaw.

"Now, finally, Newtpaw's mentor. Thistlejaw. I know you were an apprentice only a few moons ago, but your determination and loyalty to ShadowClan has not gone unnoticed. I hope you will be willing to pass down what you've learned to Newtpaw"

As his name left Mintstar's jaws, Thistlejaw froze with shock. His eyes darted around at his Clanmates, who were all staring at him expectantly. His father's cold and calculating gaze was the most intimidating out of them all.

I'm not ready for this. I can't train an apprentice when I can't even focus on myself lately!

"Thistlejaw? Is something wrong?" the ShadowClan leader meowed in slight irritation.

"I-I can't train him Mintstar...I don't think I'm ready for an apprentice. I'm truly sorry" Thistlejaw hung his head in humiliation. The cats around him murmured in dismay to each other and he could hear his father let out a low growl.

"Very well, in that case I'd like Leopardwhisper to take Newtpaw as his apprentice. Will you be able to train him Leopardwhisper?"

"I will Mintstar, I promise he'll be trained into a fine warrior" Thistlejaw's brother agreed, stepping past him to get to Newtpaw. Leopardwhisper's two different colored eyes held no emotion when he looked at Thistlejaw. Regardless, he figured his brother was disappointed with him and didn't wish to show it.

I feel like I've failed my whole Clan today. Aspenshade is more than likely the one that's the most ashamed. Having a son like me reject a first apprentice. I won't hear the end of it..he'll make sure of that.

Chapter 9

"That's ridiculous Silveroak!" a yowl of disbelief cut into Adderpaw's slumber like slashing claws. The brown tabby groggily lifted his head and blinked away the blurriness of sleep. A beam of sunlight had started peering through the den entrance, making Hollypaw's soft, dappled silver fur seemingly glow.

She's beautiful...I wonder if when we're warriors she'll consider being my mate. Adderpaw's thoughts drifted to an image of him at Hollypaw's side, their kits sleeping against her belly. He could practically feel the warmth of her muzzle nuzzling into his fur.

Another yowl interrupted his fantasy and he decided to quietly pad out of the den to greet the chilly, morning air. *Who are you even kidding Adderpaw? She'd never pick you as her mate. Besides, you have more important things to think about.*

"Calm yourself, Pineblaze. He hasn't made his decision yet" Silveroak's soothing voice murmured to the hot-headed senior warrior. They were sitting at the fresh-kill pile along with Jaytuft and Heronstar.

"You still put the idea in his head! Honestly, a *rogue* as our medicine cat? What's next? A kittypet as our leader?" Pineblaze flattened his ears, his lips curling into a disgusted snarl. Heronstar tensed up and stood in between him and Silveroak.

"Pineblaze you need to control yourself. This is hardly the way to speak to your medicine cat" Heronstar gave the brown tabby a firm growl.

"What does it matter now when she's choosing *him* as her apprentice? I was lenient when he only wanted to be a warrior Heronstar, but we all know the role of a medicine cat is sacred among the Clans and especially *WindClan,*"

"What will they all think of us when we give that position to a

former rogue? They'll think we hold no respect for StarClan!" Pineblaze's fur bristled and his tail lashed in anger. Whispers and of agreement became audible among cats who were of earshot away from the conversation.

"That is simply not true Pineblaze. StarClan work in mysterious ways, I assure you if they disagreed with the offer I gave Adderpaw they would've said something" the she-cat's eyes narrowed at Pineblaze. She was clearly offended and furious that the senior warrior would dare argue with her in such a threatening manner.

I don't blame her though! Pineblaze has always been quick to anger but he's never dared challenge authority. I wonder what Heronstar will do about all this, surely he'll give a punishment to Pineblaze for speaking so harshly!

Adderpaw's legs quivered from the amount of hostility that was in the air. He quickly became embarrassed of how much he probably looked like a frightened kit at the moment. How would he be expected to go into battle when he acted like this when trouble arose in their own Clan?

Heronstar turned his head, spotting Adderpaw standing outside the apprentice den. His blue eyes softened apologetically as he looked back at Pineblaze who was still seething with anger. Jaytuft was helping Silveroak calm down.

"Pineblaze, I'm ashamed of how you've acted today. I'm putting you on apprentice duties for three sunrises. You can start by pulling ticks off the elders" the small gray tom sat calmly and waited for the brown tabby's response. All he received was a quiet grumble and Pineblaze storming into the medicine cat den to wait for Silveroak to make mouse-bile.

"Heronstar, Silveroak. I must deeply apologize for my brother's behavior. I assure you it won't happen again" Redstripe stepped over to them and Silveroak gently put her tail against Redstripe's mouth to stop him from speaking.

"Hush. You don't need to apologize on his behalf. Pineblaze needs to realize that his outbursts have consequences even as a warrior" she

let out a long sigh and walked into her den to help Pineblaze. Redstripe stood there in silence with a cold expression on his face while he picked up a rabbit from the fresh-kill pile.

Adderpaw's eyes caught onto Heronstar's blue gaze and he nodded his head towards his den. The tabby apprentice meekly strode over to the direction he was gesturing towards, his heart thumping with anxiety.

I shouldn't be nervous, I've done nothing wrong!

"Adderpaw, I gather you heard that entire conversation?"

"Y-yes Heronstar. I mean, Pineblaze sort of woke me up with his yelling. But I think I got the general idea of what it was all about. I...I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable if I agree to join Silveroak" Adderpaw tried to make an attempt to hide how nervous he was, but to no avail, he stumbled on his words and shifted his front paws around to distract himself from having to look his leader in the eye.

"Nonsense, if StarClan has no issue with you, my Clan shouldn't either. But neither me nor Silveroak will force you into the role of medicine cat apprentice, you have plenty of time to decide. However, that's not why I called you in here" Heronstar visibly relaxed when he noticed Adderpaw's high-strung emotions.

"Really Heronstar? T-then I'm not sure what exactly you wanted me for" the brown and white tabby curled his tail over his paws, fully expecting a punishment of some kind for a crime he didn't commit. Heronstar purred in amusement and shook his head.

"Relax Adderpaw...I'm going to send you to the Gathering tonight"

The Gathering! That's right, I've never gone before! Hollypaw talked to me about it a few times before. I always thought Heronstar would be ashamed to bring me to one.

"Really? T-thank you so much!" his meow had turned into an excited squeak and he quickly bit his tongue. His pelt felt hot with embarrassment, he'd just acted like a kit in front of his Clan leader.

Thankfully no one was around to witness it except him and Heronstar, if Robinpaw heard that he would've probably taunted him until the day he died.

The gray tom didn't say a word, but his whiskers twitched like what Adderpaw assumed was him holding back his mrow of laughter. He suddenly became more serious and held his gaze with Adderpaw.

"You should run along and speak to Jaytuft about all this. I know he'll support whatever you try to do, but he's still your mentor and deserves to know how you feel about the idea"

Adderpaw curtly nodded at Heronstar, bounding out of the den to find the gray tortoiseshell tom. To his surprise he couldn't find Jaytuft anywhere around the camp. Robinpaw's ears pricked up when he passed him, "Are you looking for something?" the young tom's blue-purple eyes shone with curiosity. Not usually what Adderpaw expected from him, Robinpaw was mostly full of pride and taunts ready to throw at the brown tabby apprentice.

"Yes actually, more like some*one*. Did you seen where Jaytuft went?"

The dark brown, ginger-patched tom stretched out lazily and let out a loud yawn. His tail swished around carelessly as he lapped his tongue against his fur to clean himself.

Great, he doesn't give a mousetail. I should've known better than to ask him.

"I have no idea! You should go ask Starlingwing"

Silveroak stepped up to Adderpaw, her neck fur was still bristled up. The medicine cat appeared to be the most tense and exasperated than Adderpaw had ever seen her. She was normally so quiet you wouldn't even know WindClan had a medicine cat half the time.

"Jaytuft went on a hunting patrol, he told me he'd be back in time to train you before you go to the Gathering tonight" the she-cat's claws sank deep into the damp grass, her eyes seemed focused on something on the far horizon. Uneasiness prickled at Adderpaw and

he lowered his voice to a small mew.

"Try to forget about Pineblaze. The Clan would be lost without your care and guidance" he hoped to bring comfort to the silver and white she-cat. Silveroak broke her stare with the horizon, looking down at Adderpaw with relief flooding into her gaze.

"Thank you Adderpaw...you have much empathy for other cats. It's another reason why I think you'd be an amazing medicine cat. But whatever path you choose, you will conquer"

The she-cat's words made Adderpaw's chest surge with pride. She had faith for him and his future more than even Jaytuft did. As much as he yearned for the day he'd serve as a warrior to his Clan, what if StarClan had a bigger plan for him? To help fellow warriors more than just hunting and protecting borders.

I'd heal sick and injured cats. I'd communicate with StarClan! I might speak with my mother again if she walks among the Clan ancestors!

Eagerness tugged at his paws. Part of him wanted to jump up and announce to Silveroak that he was going to be her apprentice, the other part still clung onto the idea of him being a warrior like a hawk grabbing a piece of prey in it's talons. Adderpaw knew he couldn't train as a warrior and a medicine cat forever. One day he'd have to pick between them.

One choice to decide my whole life.

Chapter 10

After Jaytuft was done training Adderpaw in the Sand Pit, the brown tabby ate a shrew from the fresh-kill pile and went off to the elders den with a mouthful of moss to finish his daily apprentice duties.

A blind, pale ginger she-cat was the first to notice Adderpaw wandering in. The golden tabby tom sat beside her, rambling about the best hunt he had when he was a young warrior. The she-cat must've heard this story a hundred times, but yet she was perfectly patient and calm with the old tom.

"Hey Streamheart, hello Oatstep. I brought you both some fresh bedding" Adderpaw meowed out as he set down the large clump of moss and feathers.

"Ah, Adderpaw. It's so good to hear your voice again" Streamheart rasped and heaved herself up onto her paws to step out of her nest. The pale ginger she-cat's strength was fading rapidly in the last few moons. Adderpaw morbidly wondered if she was going to make it through Leaf-bare.

Oatstep followed Streamheart's lead and grunted as he stood up and stepped over to her. The tom clearly was in better shape than Streamheart, though he certainly did have his fair share of health issues.

"Rumor is you're off to the Gathering tonight" the golden tabby's tail flicked in curiosity, "What are you expecting it to be like?"

"Oh the Gathering! I remember my first Gathering, Adderpaw. It's as clear as water..I remember me and Darksmoke were so excited we could hardly walk! And seeing all those cats from different Clans is such an overwhelming experience" Streamheart chuckled at the memory.

Adderpaw cleared out the old moss from their nests and proceeded

to gently put in the new moss. His mind had been racing all day on what the Gathering would be like. Will the other cats know he's not Clanborn? Will they laugh at him and think he's a weak apprentice regardless?

"I'm not sure...I guess I'm expecting it to be crowded with lots of cats from the Clans talking" he shrugged his shoulders and lined the nests with feathers, tossing extra ones into the middle of them.

Oatstep chortled and glanced over at Streamheart who's whiskers were twitching with the same amusement, "That's the general idea of it, yes. It's the only time that we have a truce among the Clans. It's an opportunity to get to know your enemy, or to realize that we're all the same and have a civil conversation"

"And what if the truce is broken?" Adderpaw tilted his head at the older tom, "What would happen then? Surely it would be easy for a Clan to plan an attack on another if the others are expecting peace"

Streamheart immediately looked shaken at Adderpaw's theory. Despite being blind, she still managed to have a cold and grave look in her eyes, "Adderpaw, you shouldn't have such dark thoughts floating in your brain"

Oatstep curled his tail over his paws and shook his head, "It's okay Streamheart, it was only a simple question. A clever one at that. It's quite possible that it could happen, anything can happen when a Clan is ran by the right or wrong leader"

"A *simple question?* It's questions like that, that can make a tyrant! No matter how innocent they may seem.." she hissed quietly and lowered her head.

"Is this about Hawkeyes?" Oatstep's gaze softened in sympathy and he rested his paw against the she-cat's flank. Streamheart's fur flattened, not saying a word she climbed into her nest and curled up into a tight ball.

"It shouldn't bother me..it was so many seasons ago"

Streamheart's words became silent to Adderpaw. A wave of shock

had hit him like a strong, river current. One single name had changed his entire perspective on how his Clanmates would see him. Adderpaw ran out of the elders den to find a private spot in camp to process what he heard.

Hawkeyes.

Hawkeyes was my mother. What could she have done to cause this amount of distress for Streamheart?

The journey to the Gathering felt as if it lasted a lifetime. Adderpaw was too distracted by his thoughts from earlier to focus on anything else. The anxiety of being around unknown cats ebbed away, replaced by the sick feeling that his mother might have hurt cats in WindClan. Hurt them so much that Streamheart was still thinking about it seasons after.

Hollypaw broke his trail of thought by shoving against his shoulder, causing him to become unbalanced and trip over his own paws. Robinpaw paused to let out a howl of laughter, "Wow Adderpaw! You're as clumsy as an injured rabbit!"

He shook the dirt off his pelt while Hollypaw helped him stand back up, "I'm sorry Adderpaw. I didn't realize that you weren't paying attention" her tail flicked in embarrassment. Robinpaw's laughter still boomed in his ears.

"Oh for StarClan's sake. Spare all of our ears and be quiet" Robinpaw's mentor Fawnpool meowed sternly to him.

They eventually arrived to the Four-Boulders. Adderpaw's green eyes widened at the sight of bustling cats, new scents heavily filled his nostrils. Hollypaw whispered to him excitedly, "I'm so glad you're joining us this time Adderpaw! I'll introduce you to some new apprentices" her dark blue eyes sparkled.

I wonder what it's going to be like having a friend in another Clan. Wouldn't that make things worse when you might have to fight them in battle?

"Hollypaw!" yowls of greeting split the air and three apprentices rushed over to them. The biggest apprentice was a dark gray long furred tom with white markings, the apprentice ahead of the other two was a slim brown she-cat with a long black tail, and the last was a golden-brown and white tom.

Hollypaw purred happily when the three apprentices stood in front of her. Adderpaw didn't feel nearly as comfortable as the silver she-cat did. After all this time of living with WindClan he still felt like an outsider, especially when it came to meeting other Clan cats. He imagined their stares burrowing into the depths of his soul and discovering he was once a rogue.

I know it's a crazy thought, but it doesn't make this less nerve-racking.

The slim she-cat gasped in surprise when she spotted Adderpaw, "Hello there! I don't remember seeing you last Gathering. I'm Mothpaw from ThunderClan!" Mothpaw seemed very energetic, but at least she was friendly and warm.

"I-I'm Adderpaw" he replied sheepishly. He wanted to match Mothpaw's energy, however he figured he could never be that confident in himself to do so. The two tom's exchanged glances when Adderpaw spoke, causing his stomach to drop with dread.

Oh great StarClan. They think I'm a mousebrain! Am I not acting normal? I hate feeling anxious during these situations!

"And these two are Crowpaw and Sunpaw" Hollypaw gestured with her tail over at the two toms, "Crowpaw is from ShadowClan and Sunpaw is from RiverClan" they both mewed their greetings to Adderpaw and turned back to chat among each other.

"Yeah, Crowpaw is the *only* ShadowClan apprentice!" Mothpaw sat close to Adderpaw, brushing her long tail against his own. His ears felt like they were on fire they were so warm from the awkwardness of knowing Hollypaw was watching them.

"Not anymore. Fogpaw, Newtpaw and Breezepaw became apprentices yesterday. Mintstar will probably announce it to everyone else when she speaks" Crowpaw lifted his head up proudly

and puffed out his chest, "Which means by the next Gathering I'll have my warrior name. Whirlsplash says I'm more than ready"

"I wonder what your warrior name will be" Hollypaw tilted her head, looking up at the sky in thought. Sunpaw purred, looking very pleased with himself. He lifted his tail in the air and belted out, "By the powers of StarClan I give you your warrior name. Crowpaw, from this moment on you will be known as....Crowfood!"

Mothpaw and Hollypaw mrowed in laughter, Crowpaw didn't seem amused by the joke, but he wasn't angry. He simply rolled his eyes at the other apprentices. Adderpaw slunk away from them. Even though the apprentices were friendly, he still felt out of place in the group. He wanted to take a look around the Gathering area anyways.

The stars glittered across the dark, velvety, night sky. The bright moonlight made the hollow feel somehow bigger than it really was. Adderpaw wanted to go explore outside of it and get away from all the chatty cats. All the different noises and scents made him uneasy, but he knew better than to rush off without any of his Clanmates knowing where he was.

A hiss of pain nearly knocked Adderpaw off his paws in surprise. He swiftly noticed that he had stepped on a cat's tail and he jumped backwards. He stumbled over his words trying to meow out an apology when the cat whipped around to face him.

He was a muscular blue-gray tom with piercing yellow eyes. A memory of when he was a part of the border patrol that found Thrushspirit's body flew into his head. Then he was finally able to stutter out an intelligible response, "I-I'm so s-sorry I didn't mean to!"

The ShadowClan warrior's eyes grazed over him coldly, before a spark of realization could be seen in them, "Maybe you should get a better pair of eyes then *kit*....wait, you're that rabbit-chaser apprentice that stood up to me at the border that one time right?"

So I was right. It was him! What was his name again? One of his Clanmates had said it, but I don't remember.

"*Rabbit-chaser?* I have a name. It's Adderpaw" Adderpaw's drew his ears back. Who did this warrior think he was insulting him and his Clan right to his face? He could at least make an attempt to show respect. The young warrior blinked innocently before replying.

"Wha?-- Ohh, sorry. It's what we call WindClan members, I'm used to saying it. I'm Thistlejaw, you can get back at me and poke fun at my name if you want" Thistlejaw suggested jokingly; but Adderpaw was able to spot a hint of resentfulness when the ShadowClan warrior said his name. That's when Adderpaw noticed the scar underneath his jaw, barely missing his mouth with the end of it reaching his cheek.

"How in Silverpelt did you get that?" he gasped. Thistlejaw looked at him questioningly and swiped his tail under his own chin. The blue-gray warrior's eyes darted back and forth around him, as if he wanted to make sure no one heard his reply.

"My scar? When I was an apprentice I fell out of a tree like a clumsy squirrel and my jaw scraped against a sharp branch on the way down. I'm lucky to be able to talk at all"

Adderpaw stared at the ShadowClan warrior in awe. He hadn't gotten scars yet, there had been no battles since he joined WindClan. And he didn't put himself into danger frequently enough to warrant even an accidental scar.

"You were brave to climb the tree in the first place! It's amazing how you were able to survive like that. WindClan cats don't get a chance to climb much—"

"We meet beneath Silverpelt, commanded by the truce of the full moon"

Adderpaw peered up at Four-Boulders when a pale brown tom with a white muzzle interrupted his conversation with Thistlejaw.

"Looks like you're going to have to go back to your Clan, Adderpaw. It was nice talking to you, you're not so bad...for a rabbit-chaser" Thistlejaw purred teasingly and gently nudged Adderpaw's side to lead him in the direction of his Clanmates. Adderpaw was still annoyed by the nickname, but he mrowed a chuckle and playfully

thwacked his paw against the warrior's head.

"I'll see you at the next Gathering, Thistlejaw." Adderpaw weaved his way through several cats until he bumped into Hollypaw. The silver she-cat's eyes widened a little and she lowered her voice to a whisper.

"Adderpaw? Where did you go?"

"Just went exploring, met a ShadowClan warrior. He turned out to be really friendly"

A warm feeling flickered in his chest when he remembered Thistlejaw's yellow eyes and his muscles rippling under his fur. He hastily pushed away the thoughts, trying to focus on what the Clan leaders were saying. Yet the thoughts kept coming back to him. The warrior had seemed like a cold and featherbrained cat at first. His attitude had certainly lived up to Adderpaw's expectations on ShadowClan warriors.

We only spoke for a short period of time...but I really want to see him again. I can't explain it even to myself. There's just something about him —

What are you thinking?! You're from WindClan and he's from ShadowClan. You can't be friends. This is the only time he'll ever look at you as an equal, the rest of the time he wouldn't hesitate to rip your pelt off if you crossed the border!

Adderpaw took a deep breath, keeping his attention on the leaders talking on Four-Boulders. It was best for him to just forget what happened earlier and pay attention to the important announcements from the other Clans.

Allegiances Update

Windclan:

Leader: Heronstar - A small light gray tom with blue eyes

Deputy: Palespeck - A golden brown she-cat with darker spots and yellow eyes.

Medicine Cat: Silveroak- A small silver she-cat with white patches and ice blue eyes.

Warriors:

Jaytuft- A fluffy gray tortoiseshell tom with green eyes

Redstripe- Reddish brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Fawnpool- A brown she-cat with white paws and amber eyes

Pineblaze- A brown tabby tom , pale yellow eyes

Embermask- A white tom with ginger face markings, hazel eyes

Badgerfur- Black and white she-cat with pale amber eyes

Juniperlight- A black she-cat with a white tipped tail and yellow eyes

Sorrelscar- A slender dark ginger she-cat with lighter markings with a scar over her eye, green eyes

Webcloud- A cream and white tabby tom with blue eyes

Apprentices:

Adderpaw- Slender dusty brown tom with rusty brown stripes and white paws/markings with green eyes. *(Mentor is Jaytuft)*

Robinpaw -A long haired dark brown tom with ginger patches and blue-purple eyes. *(Mentor is Fawnpool)*

Hollypaw- A broad shouldered silver she-cat with dappled fur and dark blue eyes. *(Mentor is Palespeck)*

Queens:

Starlingwing- A brown yellow eyed she cat with white speckles on her back. *Kits:* **Pebblekit** (a mottled brown she-cat with honey colored eyes), **Frostkit** (a white tom with two light brown front paws and pale green eyes) *Mate:* **Jaytuft**

Elders:

Streamheart- A slender pale ginger tabby she-cat with blind green eyes

Oatstep- A golden tabby tom with hazel eyes

Shadowclan:

Leader: Mintstar- A thick furred dark gray she-cat , pale green eyes

Deputy: Ottertail- A big brown and black striped tom with black paws, amber eyes

Medicine cat: Tawnyclaw- A dark ginger she-cat with black stripes, yellow-green eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Berryfur- A thick furred silver and black striped tom , pale green eyes.

Warriors:

Aspenshade- A dark blue-gray tom with amber eyes and a scarred pelt.

Thistlejaw- A broad shouldered blue-gray tom with yellow eyes.

Leopardwhisper- A black tom with darker spots with one amber eye and one yellow eye.

Dovedapple- A pale brown and silver tabby she-cat , with blue-green eyes.

Whirlsplash- A big pale gray spotted tabby she-cat with black patches, with blue eyes.

Marshfoot- A long furred brown tom with black paws and pale yellow eyes

Ebonyfern- A dark gray tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Swiftflower- A sleek pale gray and black dappled she-cat with hazel eyes.

Apprentices:

Crowpaw- A long furred dark gray tom with white markings and green eyes *(Mentor is Whirlsplash)*

Breezepaw- a small gray dappled she-cat with hazel eyes *(Mentor is Ebonyfern)*

Newtpaw- a dark brown tom with black tipped ears and a light brown muzzle, golden eyes *(Mentor is Leopardwhisper)*

Fogpaw- a gray tabby tom with amber eyes *(Mentor is Dovedapple)*

Queens:

Elders:

Jaggedfang- A thin tawny tom with a scarred face and a fang resting over his lower lip.

Thunderclan:

Leader: Oakstar- A pale brown tom with white ears and a white muzzle, light blue eyes.

Deputy: Sparrowstrike- A dark brown and white she-cat with dappled fur, green eyes.

Medicine cat: Tigerfrost- A long furred blue-gray tabby tom with white markings, black ears and amber eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Ashpaw- A gray tabby tom with three legs and amber eyes

Warriors:

Hollowpelt- A red-brown and black she-cat with black patches and green eyes

Emeraldtalon- A brown spotted tabby tom with black ears, brilliant green eyes

Minnowthroat- A long furred pale gray tabby tom with a white patch on his throat and yellow eyes

Brackendusk- A dark brown she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Creektail- A sleek white tabby tom with hazel eyes

Apprentices:

Mothpaw- A slim brown she cat with a long black tail and blue eyes *(Mentor is Creektail)*

Nettlepaw- A brown and cream colored she-cat with yellow eyes *(Mentor is Emeraldtalon)*

Lizardpaw- A brown tom with lighter paws and a thin tail with green eyes *(Mentor is Minnowthroat)*

Riverclan:

Leader: Smokestar- A light gray and silver she-cat, golden eyes.

Deputy: Tangleflame- A dark ginger spotted she-cat,amber eyes.

Medicine cat: Lilywhisker- A light brown she-cat with a white underbelly, yellow eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Sheepbounce- A long furred white she-cat with yellow eyes

Warriors:

Spiderstripe- A cream colored she-cat with black stripes and amber eyes

Timbercloud- A dark gray tom with hazel eyes

Cherrypool- A ginger she-cat with white markings and blue eyes

Waspflight- A golden tabby tom with a black tipped tail and amber eyes

Blizzardleaf- A big white tom with silver paws and amber eyes

Apprentices:

Sunpaw- A golden-brown and white tom with amber eyes *(Mentor is Spiderstripe)*

Finchpaw- A gray-brown dappled she-cat with pale green eyes *(Mentor is Blizzardleaf)*

Cats Outside the Clans:

Pandora- A calico she-cat with ice blue eyes and a collar.

Chapter 11

Dead pine needles crunched beneath the WindClan cats' paws as they made their moonlit journey back to the camp. The Gathering had been rather uneventful. The ThunderClan leader Oakstar had stated that prey was running well in their territory; the RiverClan leader Smokestar mentioned how two litters of kits had been born in the last moon; Mintstar of ShadowClan had announced all the new apprentices' names; and lastly Heronstar had announced Adderpaw's arrival.

Having cats from other Clans cheer his name was a slightly embarrassing feeling. But he did take notice that the young ShadowClan warrior he'd met was the loudest one to call out his name other than his own Clanmates.

It was a pleasant first Gathering for the most part. I just wish I hadn't made myself look like a fool in front of Hollypaw's friends. Adderpaw thought shamefully, looking back at the dappled silver apprentice. She didn't seem to notice he was staring at her, caught up in a quiet conversation with Robinpaw.

When they arrived at the camp entrance the clearing was eerily silent. An overwhelming feeling of panic arose in him. His anxiety was proven to be justified when a horrified yowl broke the silence.

Sorrelscar raced out of the warriors den in time to crash into Heronstar. Her green eyes were wide with shock. Heronstar let his voice become a calm and comforting mew, "Sorrelscar, what's wrong?"

"It's Pineblaze..h-he's *dead!* " she wailed, burying her face against her leader's shoulder.

"Dead? Was he attacked?" Robinpaw tensed at his mother's words, his tail bristled up ready to attack any intruders.

Sorrelscar shook her head, "He just started having a coughing fit in his sleep, he started foaming out of his mouth..I tried to wake him up but he stopped breathing before I was able to do much else"

Silveroak appeared from the warriors den, carrying Pineblaze's body with the help of Webcloud and Juniperlight. Robinpaw rushed over to his older brother's body, his legs shaking with grief. Sorrelscar joined him and started sharing tongues with Pineblaze one last time.

Where's Redstripe? Surely he's heard the news about Pineblaze. Why isn't he out here?

"Silveroak, what do you think happened?" Palespeck settled next to the medicine cat, turning her glance to Pineblaze's body. Heronstar joined the two she-cats, his head and ears lowered in sorrow. Adderpaw felt a pang of sympathy for the three cats. They all were so important to WindClan, yet they're losing warriors left and right.

"All I remember was that Pineblaze was complaining about his stomach after he ate. However, he refused to eat juniper berries when I offered them" Silveroak stared at her paws, her voice sounded choked up.

Does she blame herself for what happened? Pineblaze and her did *have a big argument this morning. Poor Silveroak. She doesn't deserve to feel like that. No cat seemed to know that he was in bad shape after all.*

Heronstar rested his tail against his littermate's back to comfort her. Though, every cat in the Clan was distressed at the moment. Maybe it would be best for some cat to say something to ease this situation. Another great warrior had gone to StarClan, would they be losing more in the future?

There aren't any she-cats pregnant with any kits either. Though, Badgerfur and Embermask have been hanging around together often. I'm not sure if she's ready to have another mate.

Redstripe finally appeared and stared at his brother's corpse before walking right past it and to the camp entrance. Adderpaw grit his teeth to hold back his frustration with the tom. Usually the senior

warrior was kind and considerate. Why was he acting so emotionless when his brother died and his mother and younger brother needed his support?

"Give him time to think, Adderpaw" Palespeck murmured soothingly to him, "Not every cat can deal with grief the same way as others. Guarding the camp might help him" the golden-brown she-cat nudged him and looked at the apprentice den.

"If you don't wish to share tongues with Pineblaze you should get some rest"

Adderpaw felt guilt rush through his veins. Pineblaze was the most openly rude cat in the Clan towards him; even Robinpaw couldn't match the disgust the brown tabby tom had. Tiredness ebbed at his mind. He wouldn't be opposed to laying down in his soft nest and forget all of the things that happened that day.

His Clanmates came before him. That's one of the first rules Jaytuft had taught him. Adderpaw shook his head, he was going to swallow his pride and stay for the vigil of Pineblaze. Palespeck's ears twitched in astonishment, but nevertheless she meowed softly.

"How very noble of you. Heronstar was right,you'll be a fine warrior" the golden-brown speckled deputy traipsed to Sorrelscar and Robinpaw's side to offer her condolences.

'You'll be a fine warrior'

The words echoed in Adderpaw's head. He thought back on Silveroak's offer as he looked up at the sky. The velvety blue darkness was slowly fading into a lighter shade and the clouds were tinted pink.

Being a medicine cat would be rewarding, yes. Being closer to warrior ancestors and taking care of cats who truly needed it sounded like one of the most fulfilling Clan roles someone could take on. He let out a quiet sigh, looking at the cats near Pineblaze's corpse.

It's not the life I want. It's not the path I set out to do when I joined

WindClan.

Adderpaw wanted to serve his Clan by going on hunting patrols, protecting borders, fighting off Clans or anything else that dared to attack them. He even possibly wanted to have kits and a mate that he loved with all his heart.

Why would I give all that up? Silveroak will find a kit who wants to learn all those things. I can help out once in a while until that day comes.

He shared tongues with Pineblaze. Saying his last farewells to the warrior who never accepted him. All that didn't matter now, he walked among StarClan. Perhaps they'd meet again when his time came. They might push past their differences, realize that Adderpaw was just as loyal as a Clanborn cat.

His mind wandered back to what Streamheart had mentioned this morning about his 'dark thoughts' and how she had some connection to his mother. It was strange, and he planned to ask the elder about it later today.

I'm going to be a warrior. I'm going to bury whatever my mother did towards this Clan and prove them wrong!

Chapter 12

"No, Newtpaw! You need to use your hind legs when you're pinned down by an enemy. Do you want to be killed in your first battle?"

Thistlejaw strode through the pine trees, ears pricked up when he heard his brother Leopardwhisper training his apprentice. He decided it wouldn't hurt to go over to the training hollow and see how they were doing.

Newtpaw was in the middle of tussling with Crowpaw. The larger apprentice was ready to charge at the smaller one. Leopardwhisper stood by and watched closely, his tail twitching with irritation.

I can't see Whirlsplash anywhere. Perhaps she had to go on a patrol and leave Crowpaw with Leopardwhisper.

"Newtpaw. What did I say earlier? Unsheathe your claws! Warriors don't fight with their claws hidden from sight!" Leopardwhisper growled out. Thistlejaw's heart dropped to his stomach. He knew his brother was ruthless when it came to battles, he's seen him in action. However, something about Leopardwhisper's harsh tone to his own apprentice was a bit unnerving.

He reminds me of Aspenshade, he used to tell us to train like that. Not that I can't *be overly aggressive once in a while; but I would never force it on a cat as young as Newtpaw.*

Newtpaw stood his ground, keeping his eyes on the dark gray and white tom. Crowpaw came barreling towards him, swiping his paw towards the younger cat's face with unsheathed claws. Newtpaw was quick enough to duck his head down before the paw could connect with his face, instead Crowpaw's claws ended up scratching against Newtpaw's ear.

Thistlejaw froze, worried that Crowpaw might have injured him. Thankfully there seemed to be no signs of distress from Newtpaw at all. The dark brown apprentice took the opportunity to leap at

Crowpaw, his tail lashing when he managed to knock the dark gray tom off his paws.

Newtpaw didn't waste a second to gloat, he swiftly sank his claws into Crowpaw's chest before Leopardwhisper had a chance to speak. Blood welled from Newtpaw's punctures slowly and Crowpaw thrashed his body violently to wriggle away. Thistlejaw stared in horror at the sight, meanwhile his brother continued sitting in complete silence.

"Stop it, Newtpaw!" Thistlejaw yowled and stormed over. Infuriated that Leopardwhisper allowed any of this to happen. Newtpaw went wide-eyed, jumping away from Crowpaw to join his mentor's side.

Crowpaw scrambled to his paws, his chest heaving as he took heavy breaths. Thistlejaw examined the older apprentice's wound, "You'll be fine Crowpaw, but you should go to camp and ask Tawnyclaw to help you with the bleeding" he meowed carefully. Crowpaw didn't need to be asked twice, he bounded out of the training hollow towards the ShadowClan camp.

"How inconsiderate of you to interrupt my training, brother" Leopardwhisper appeared to be the calmest cat out of the three at the moment; but his voice was tense. He obviously didn't enjoy the fact Thistlejaw had barged in, fair enough, but surely Leopardwhisper could see it was going too far.

"Believe me Leopardwhisper, I wouldn't have interrupted if I didn't think anyone was in danger of getting seriously injured" he assured the black spotted tom.

"It wasn't any of your business in the first place, Thistlejaw. You had your chance to mentor Newtpaw and you refused"

"But you let Newtpaw use unsheathed claws on Crowpaw! What if he went for his neck or his face inste---" Thistlejaw persisted, he wasn't going to let his brother off so easily. Leopardwhisper ended up cutting him off, his amber and yellow eyes narrowing.

"Crowpaw was perfectly safe. You really think I'd let my apprentice kill a Clanmate? You truly have a twisted mind Thistlejaw...now

leave us be" Leopardwhisper turned his cold gaze away from him, letting it settle on Newtpaw.

"Come along Newtpaw. I'll show you how to properly climb a tree"

The dark brown apprentice's black tipped ears perked up in excitement. He followed after Leopardwhisper to the grove of small pine trees that apprentices would first practice on; not bothering to take one look at Thistlejaw in the process.

Both guilt and irritation prickled in his pelt. He slashed his claws across a clump of grass, taking some of the damp soil with it. He should have known better than to meddle into his brother's mentoring. Leopardwhisper was right after all, he had a chance to mentor Newtpaw himself but he rejected the offer.

But it's not my fault that flea-brain is training Newtpaw like that! I was just trying to help. And what thanks do I get? Even Crowpaw didn't look grateful!

Thistlejaw paced back and forth in the training hollow. His ears hot with anger. He swiped at the ground more until he heard rustling coming from the bushes nearby. Thistlejaw whipped his head around only to see Ebonyfern walk out with a gray dappled figure darting past her to the middle of the hollow.

"Slow down Breezepaw. You'll need to save all that energy for hunting training!" Ebonyfern purred in amusement at her apprentice's eagerness. Her amber eyes shined brighter when she noticed Thistlejaw.

"Thistlejaw? What are you doing out here you furball!"

"Nothing. Going back to camp now, I need to talk with Tawnyclaw" he meowed quickly, brushing past her before she could speak another word to him.

You're being rude to a cat you care about again. Not that thinking about it won't stop you from doing it. You could've stopped and explained. Mouse-brain.

He bit his tongue at his own judgmental thoughts. No use making

himself feel worse today, he just needed some herbs from the medicine den to calm his nerves. Maybe even a nap would help ease the tenseness in his muscles.

"Tawnyclaw?" Thistlejaw peered into the medicine cat entrance. Crowpaw was sitting in the middle of the den with his wound being treated with cobwebs by the medicine cat apprentice, Berryfur.

The silver and black tabby tom's green gaze shot towards him. Thistlejaw could practically feel the disapproval radiating off of him.

"Crowpaw tells me that he got injured from helping Newtpaw train" Berryfur's mew was monotone, catching Thistlejaw off-guard, "I don't approve of this type of battle training, Thistlejaw"

Thistlejaw's throat tightened immediately. What was he talking about? It wasn't his fault at all. What had Crowpaw told him? His stomach started to feel queasy. He didn't know what to say other than outright deny it.

"Berryfur, I wasn't the one training them. It was Leopardwhisper. You *know* I'm not a mentor"

"Hm." was the only response the medicine cat apprentice gave him. The black-striped tom took cobwebs off of Crowpaw's wound. He closely examined it, purring with delight when he noticed the bleeding had stopped completely, "Good as new. You're lucky he didn't leave you worse off. Now, run along"

Crowpaw padded out of the medicine den as soon as Berryfur allowed him to. Meanwhile, Thistlejaw was still standing near the entrance in confusion.

Does Berryfur really think I condoned all this? For a medicine cat he can be a big fuzz-brain sometimes! I was the one who helped *Crowpaw!*

A dark ginger tabby she-cat stepped past Thistlejaw, carrying a large bundle of herbs in her mouth. The strong flowery scents wafted through the air, stinging his nose and leaving behind a burning sensation in the back of his throat.

"Tawnyclaw, can I have some poppy seeds?" his voice lowered to a timid mew.

Ever since he took Ebonyfern's advice and asked for herbs to help ward off his dreams, he felt awkward asking the medicine cat for them. He didn't consider his problems to be worthy of taking herbs every time he went to sleep.

Tawnyclaw set down the bundle of herbs and gestured with her tail for Berryfur to sort through them. The tom only let out a light grumble, turning his attention away from Thistlejaw to obey his mentor's orders. Tawnyclaw's whiskers twitched in curiosity at Berryfur's attitude, but she simply shook her head and sat in front of Thistlejaw.

"Have the nightmares subsided at all Thistlejaw? I'm worried that you might become reliant on them if you take them too often" her tail curled around her paws and her bright yellow-green eyes searched his as if she were trying to read his thoughts.

"I guess they haven't been too bad lately. The poppy seeds relax me enough to where I don't worry about having them in the first place"

Tawnyclaw listened to him closely and flicked the tip of her tail. She seemed to be pondering his words carefully before she finally spoke up, "Try to sleep without them tonight. If you have any difficulties you can come to me at dawn so we can discuss it further"

Thistlejaw nodded his head and purred a thank you to her. He began walking towards the warriors den but his steps were interrupted by Mintstar's voice booming across the camp.

"All cats old enough to climb, gather beneath the High-Branch for a Clan meeting!"

He spotted Whirlsplash whispering something to Crowpaw, his green eyes lit up and he bounded over to sit next to the other three apprentices. Breezepaw and Fogpaw chattered with him while their tails swished with anticipation.

Thistlejaw joined his Clanmates under the High-Branch. He ended up sitting beside the Clan deputy, Ottertail; a large brown tabby tom with amber eyes, and powerful black paws. He also happened to be Newtpaw, Breezepaw, and Fogpaw's father. Despite the fact he could take down two or more cats on his own, he was still gentle and kind towards his kin and Clanmates.

It's part of what will make him an amazing leader one day. He chooses to use his logic over his brute strength. Cats of any Clan can respect that.

Not that he didn't respect Mintstar, but everyone knew the dark gray she-cat was nearing her last life. The white hairs on her muzzle really gave it away. Not to mention Tawnyclaw fussed over her overexerting herself, or whenever she had aching muscles. The stubborn leader still stood her ground and insisted to the medicine cat that she was fine.

It must be hard to admit to yourself when you've served the Clan to your limit. She could always retire if she became fully unable to do her duties though, she's not a mouse-brain.

"Crowpaw, please step forward" Mintstar announced. Crowpaw stopped chatting with his denmates and shakily climbed up onto the rock below the branch. Thistlejaw held back an amused purr; he hadn't seen Crowpaw act so nervous. He was always a bundle of determination.

"Whirlsplash has spoken to me about how you've passed your warrior assessment, Crowpaw. And as tradition, it is time for you to receive your warrior name" Mintstar looked down at Crowpaw proudly.

"I Mintstar, leader of ShadowClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. Crowpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect your Clan, even at the cost of your own life?"

"I do, Mintstar"

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Crowpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Crowstrike.

StarClan honors your dedication and courage, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ShadowClan"

Mintstar leaped down to join Crowpaw on the rock. She rested her muzzle on Crowstrike's head and the gray tom licked his leader's shoulder respectively. The Clan erupted into chanting the new warrior's name. Thistlejaw joined in, despite his suspicions of Crowstrike lying to Berryfur earlier, he was still his Clanmate.

"Crowstrike!"

"Crowstrike!"

Crowstrike would sit in vigil and guard the camp for the entire night before he would be allowed to join the others in the warriors den. Thistlejaw remembered back on he and Leopardwhisper's vigil back in Greenleaf. With the mix of the warm night air and the comforting sound of crickets; it took everything in his power not to fall asleep.

Speaking of sleep. I'm about to fall face-first onto the ground if I don't get in my nest soon. Thistlejaw thought, on cue he let out a yawn and padded slowly to the warriors den. When he curled up into a tight ball in his nest of moss he nearly immediately drifted to sleep.

Thistlejaw was running through the darkened forest, zigzagging through towering pine trees. There was no stars or moon to be seen, everything was darkness except for a white glowing trail beneath his paws.

Panic spread through his chest when he reached the edge of a cliff. He sank his claws into the dirt to stop himself from falling off into the black abyss. A threatening yowl echoed behind him and he whipped around to see a pair of amber eyes narrowing at him.

"What do you *want*?" he hissed loudly, his fur spiking up in fear.

The figure didn't bother to answer him. It only approached him slowly, making Thistlejaw consider taking a step back just to escape from it. The scent of fresh blood filled his mouth, causing him to

cough violently.

The figure with the amber eyes took the chance to leap at Thistlejaw, knocking him off the edge of the cliff. Thistlejaw yowled with distress and flailed his legs helplessly as he fell. He made contact with water and he managed to grip onto a log to stay on the surface.

He looked down at his paws, to his horror he'd realized what he fell into wasn't water at all. It was a river of blood. It was thick and coppery scented, just the sight alone made him want to vomit.

A light gray cat with stars in her pelt and glowing yellow eyes appeared on the log with him. She quickly grabbed the scruff of his neck into her jaws and pulled him further out of the blood. Thistlejaw went to thank the she-cat, but was met by a burst of familiarity.

"M-mom?"

The she-cat pressed her face against Thistlejaw's neck. Warmth filled his entire body and the fear he'd felt was long forgotten in one single moment. His mother leaned up and whispered into his ear.

"My son, be wary of who you trust" her voice kept it's comforting softness, even when she was speaking seriously.

Thistlejaw's happiness quickly devolved into confusion. What was she talking about? Of course he knew not to trust every cat he met.

"Be wary of who you trust, even the most loyal cats can stray from their Clanmates and the Warrior Code. If that loyalty is broken, innocent blood will be shed"

Thistlejaw gasped awake and he looked around desperately at his denmates. No one must have heard him, they were all sound asleep in their nests. Still shaken up from his dream, Thistlejaw quietly and carefully stepped over the sleeping bodies of his fellow warriors.

He sat outside the den and watched as sun rays started shining through the tree branches. A sight he would have found comforting

if it weren't for his mind trying to process what had happened in his own sleep.

I think…I just received a prophecy.

Chapter 13

Moons had passed since the night of Pineblaze's death. Leaf-bare was upon the four Clans and prey had become even less scarce than before.

Adderpaw continued to train hard with Jaytuft, telling Silveroak the news that he didn't wish to be apprenticed by her. Disappointment had been clear to see in her eyes, but she remained understanding despite it.

The first snowflakes of Leaf-bare danced gracefully down to the ground below. Despite the weather, Adderpaw was busy trying to pass his warrior assessment. A cold chill ran up Adderpaw's spine, but he tried to ignore it, setting his sights on a rabbit that was sniffing the grass in search for something to nibble on.

He flattened himself to the ground and slowly began to approach the rabbit. His mouth was practically watering at the thought of sinking his teeth into a warm piece of prey. However, he'd give up the rabbit to the elders first. Streamheart wasn't doing so well these days, there was a good chance she wouldn't survive Leaf-bare.

All the more reason I need to speak with her about my mother. I've been so busy these past moons I haven't had a chance to sit and talk with her for a long time.

As soon as Adderpaw had approached the rabbit close enough, he leaped out at it. The rabbit bolted across the moor in fear, trying to get back to it's burrow. Adderpaw swiftly ran after it, the frosty cold air nipped at his nose and the falling snow was starting to get into his eyes. The rabbit moved clumsily down a hill and Adderpaw took his chance to bounce on top of the rabbit and fasten his jaws around it's neck until he crushed it's windpipe.

When the rabbit fell limp he took a few heartbeats to catch his breath. He had no idea hunting in this type of weather would be so difficult. Surprisingly this had been one of his best hunts all season.

And there's plenty of meat on this rabbit's bones. It could fill at least two or three cats' bellies.

Adderpaw proudly picked the rabbit back up and made his way back to Jaytuft. His mentor was sitting under the shelter of a lonely pine tree. His fur appeared to be far fluffier than it was in Greenleaf; perfect for keeping warm in Leaf-bare.

"You caught it! Well great StarClan, it looks like I'll be speaking with Heronstar about your warriors ceremony!" Jaytuft meowed happily and gestured with his tail for Adderpaw to follow him to camp. Adderpaw complied, slightly slowed down by the weight of the rabbit.

The camp clearing nearly looked empty. The snow had driven most cats into their dens, a few warriors remained under the shelter of trees sharing tongues and prey. And Robinpaw was showing Frostpaw and Pebblepaw a battle technique for when there came to be deeper snow.

Adderpaw couldn't believe how fast the two kits had grown. It seemed like just yesterday they were mewling and tumbling around carelessly. Now they were sharing a den together and learning the basics of survival in a Clan.

Hollypaw stepped out of the elder's den and beamed when she spotted Adderpaw carrying the rabbit, "Wow, Adderpaw! That's one of the biggest rabbits I've ever seen! Streamheart and Oatstep will love it" she purred.

Adderpaw couldn't talk with the mouthful of rabbit, he simply nodded in acknowledgement towards Hollypaw and made his way into the elder's den. He placed the rabbit in between the two elders and shook the snow off of his fur.

The golden tabby tom looked over at Streamheart in excitement, "Well, well, Adderpaw brought us a rabbit. Thank you young'in this'll be delicious, I'm sure." He prodded the rabbit towards Streamheart's nose. The frail, blind she-cat sniffed at the rabbit and took a weak bite from it's belly.

"Streamheart? Do you need Silveroak to take a look at you?--"

"I don't need anybody's help. I can function just fine!" Streamheart hissed raggedly, her claws raked through the moss in her nest. Adderpaw flinched back at the she-cat's sudden hostility.

"Sorry. Look, I wanted to talk to you about something Streamheart. Something important. You've mentioned a Hawkeyes before, and I wanted you to know that she was my mother" he announced firmly.

Streamheart's fur bristled, her lip drew up into a snarl, "Oh, so that's it then! You were sent here by your fox-heart mother to kill me! Well I may be old and blind, Adderpaw, but I've seen the darkness that resides in you already. Go ahead and kill me, but when you die you'll surely join your mother in the Dark Forest!" She spat, her tail was lashing wildly and her blind green eyes were wide with both fear and anger.

Oatstep's ears flattened and he rested his head on top of Streamheart's shoulders. The gesture seemed to ease her out of her furious state, but her body started quivering. Adderpaw took the hint, bounding out of the den. He had to talk to some cat about this, he had to know what his mother did.

Maybe Heronstar knows. If it was that bad, surely the leader would know what happened...but is now really the time to mention that I'm her son? I'm so close to being named a warrior of WindClan!

"May all cats old enough to run on the moor, gather beneath the Sky Stone for a Clan meeting!" Heronstar announced. Snowflakes caught in his whiskers, but the gray leader didn't seem bothered by it.

Adderpaw's heart leaped in his chest. This was it, he was going to receive his warrior name. He looked around at Robinpaw and Hollypaw, the two had grown closer during Leaf-fall. Adderpaw couldn't help but feel a twinge of jealousy towards the dark brown and ginger tom. They were both fidgeting with excitement.

Are they getting their warrior names too? There's no way Robinpaw

would be excited for just me alone.

"Hollypaw, Robinpaw, and Adderpaw, please step forward" Heronstar instructed, the three of them moved up above their Clanmates. Robinpaw walked proudly, Hollypaw was shy but held her head up, and Adderpaw nearly stumbled over his own paws with nervousness.

"I Heronstar, leader of WindClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down upon these three apprentices. Do you three promise to uphold the warrior code and protect your Clan, even at the cost of your own lives?"

"I do!" Robinpaw blurted out smugly.

"I do.." Hollypaw calmly meowed.

"I-I do." Adderpaw choked down his anxiety and tried his best to replace it with determination.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names. Hollypaw, from this moment on you will be known as Hollywish. StarClan honors your warmth and honesty, and we welcome you as a full warrior of WindClan" Heronstar looked at Hollywish proudly and rested his muzzle on her head, Hollywish licked her father's shoulder and purred happily.

"Hollywish!"

"Hollywish!"

Hollywish meekly stepped back and sat next to Adderpaw again. She looked embarrassed from all the attention the Clan had put on her, but Adderpaw could tell this was one of the happiest moments of her life.

"Robinpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Robinbriar. StarClan honors your independence and courage"

Robinbriar repeated the exchange of respect between himself and Heronstar. The Clan chanted his name and then everything went silent when they realized who was up next. Adderpaw gulped, his

claws tried to dig themselves into the stone.

"And lastly, Adderpaw. You came to us as a rogue, but you have proven yourself over these six moons. From this moment on you will be known as Adderstorm. StarClan honors your loyalty and determination"

Adderstorm. My name is Adderstorm now. I did it, I actually did it!

He didn't even realize the Clan was chanting his name. Even Hollywish and, surprisingly, Robinbriar joined in. Heronstar rested his muzzle on top of his head and murmured into his ear.

"I'm proud to have you as a warrior of my Clan, Adderstorm. You never gave up, even with all the prejudice against you. Congratulations"

Adderstorm nodded and quickly licked his leader's shoulder. Looking back on it, he wished that he would've said something of more substance, but his senses were overwhelmed. All he could do was sit there and listen to his Clanmates chants.

"Hollywish! Robinbriar! Adderstorm!"

Adderstorm and his denmates guarded the camp. They paced back and forth to keep themselves warm. Their vigil of silence was only halfway finished and the snow had already blanketed the entire moor in a cold, white pelt.

The silence had Adderstorm's mind stirring at what happened earlier with Streamheart. She had said that he had darkness in him. That couldn't be true! He wouldn't ever hurt any of his Clanmates. He had sat in mourning for Pineblaze, a cat who was nothing but rude towards him. How could she possibly think that he was evil?

Maybe in her old age, her mind is finally losing it's rationality. She used to like me before all this happened!

It made him worry for the old she-cat. He only hoped that Oatstep had gotten her to eat more of the rabbit he caught for them earlier;

she needed all the help she could get.

Adderstorm curled his tail over his paws and shivered. Hollywish glanced over at him, her deep blue eyes softened and she sat right next to him and pressed herself against him. Warmth immediately flooded through Adderstorm, he nodded a thank you to the dappled she-cat. Robinbriar let out an audible huff of disapproval. It was obvious the tom was jealous, but he couldn't do anything to stop it. He had a thick pelt after all, it wasn't as easy for him to get cold.

Clouds moved over the sliver of moon, blocking out any form of light. Suddenly, a battle cry ripped through the air. Adderstorm and Hollywish both tensed up and scrambled to their paws. Robinbriar was far more prepared than them, he unsheathed his claws and jumped in front of the camp entrance.

Heavy paws slammed against his side, causing Adderstorm to slam into the snowy ground. He unsheathed his claws and battered them swiftly against his attacker's face. The cat screeched in pain, letting go of him.

Adderstorm got back to his paws and tried his best to identify the cats attacking them. A strong scent of fish and oak trees filled his mouth. A dark gray tom with angry hazel eyes hissed and leaped at Adderstorm, he was quick enough to duck his head down and dodge the blow.

"Everyone wake up! RiverClan is attacking!" Hollywish yowled into the camp. Almost immediately, warriors started darting out of their den. They joined the three new warriors and began attacking the RiverClan warriors fiercely.

Adderstorm looked around at all the chaos that was ensuing. He could see Frostpaw and his mentor Sorrelscar fighting off a cream colored she-cat with black stripes. The she-cat's shoulder was bleeding heavily, yet she still managed to injure Sorrelscar's flank.

The WindClan warriors thankfully outnumbered the RiverClan warriors. It was mouse-brained of them to attack the camp directly and not a border patrol. However, it was more confusing as to why exactly they were attacking WindClan in the first place.

His eyes narrowed when his eyes fell onto a cat he recognized as Sunpaw from the Gathering all those moons ago; he heard from Robinbriar that he was called Sunsong now. The golden-brown and white tom was sneaking up behind Hollywish while she was occupied with fighting alongside Palespeck and Juniperlight.

Adderstorm hurtled toward the golden-brown tom as swiftly as he could. He sank his teeth into the side of the young warrior's neck and snarled with fury. No one was hurting his Clanmates, especially not his best friend. Sunsong gasped in surprise, whipping his head violently to shake Adderstorm off. The brown tabby held on tighter to Sunsong, his green eyes blazing with rage.

He raked his claws deeply across the RiverClan warrior's side, causing him to yowl in agony. Blood soaked his paw and stained the snow underneath them.

"RiverClan, retreat!" a dark ginger spotted she-cat yowled to her Clanmates.

The RiverClan warriors wasted no time running off to follow their deputy. Adderstorm still had Sunsong pinned underneath him, his claws were sinking into the golden-brown warrior's belly. Sunsong writhed around and caterwauled loudly.

"Stop! Please stop! Great StarClan, someone help me!"

Sunsong's cries didn't register in Adderstorm's mind. They sounded like they were coming from far away. All he could focus on was the blood and his own ragged breathing. A spark of excitement coursed through his shoulders and down to his claws, which were ripping through Sunsong's flesh.

He was enjoying this.

He didn't want to stop.

You have to keep going.

"Adderstorm! *Enough! "*

Before he knew what was happening he was tumbling face-first into

the snow. Once the frigid snow hit his nose he snapped out of his trance-like state. He panted against the ground and looked down at himself. Wet blood had flattened most of the fur on his chest and paws. The sight of it made his stomach churn in horror.

"What in StarClan's name is *wrong* with you, Adderstorm? Didn't you hear that they were retreating?" it was Palespeck's voice. He'd never heard her this mad before, the deputy was usually a very calm and reasonable cat.

"I-I didn't mean--" Adderstorm weakly tried to explain but his sentence trailed off into a quiet mew. There was no excuse for this, not even one day as a warrior and he'd messed everything up. He looked out into the darkness just in time to see an unconscious Sunsong, being carried by two of his Clanmates.

What have I done?

Allegiances Update #2

Windclan:

Leader: Heronstar - A small light gray tom with blue eyes

Deputy: Palespeck - A golden brown she-cat with darker spots and yellow eyes.

Medicine Cat: Silveroak- A small silver she-cat with white patches and ice blue eyes.

Warriors:

Adderstorm- Slender dusty brown tom with rusty brown stripes and white paws/markings with green eyes.

Hollywish- A broad shouldered silver she-cat with dappled fur and dark blue eyes.

Robinbriar -A long haired dark brown tom with ginger patches and blue-purple eyes.

Jaytuft- A fluffy gray tortoiseshell tom with green eyes

Starlingwing- A brown yellow eyed she cat with white speckles on

her back.

Redstripe- Reddish brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Fawnpool- A brown she-cat with white paws and amber eyes

Embermask- A white tom with ginger face markings, hazel eyes

Juniperlight- A black she-cat with a white tipped tail and yellow eyes

Sorrelscar- A slender dark ginger she-cat with lighter markings with a scar over her eye, green eyes

Webcloud- A cream and white tabby tom with blue eyes

Apprentices:

Pebblepaw- A mottled brown she-cat with honey colored eyes *(Mentor is Embermask)*

Frostpaw- A white tom with two light brown front paws and pale green eyes *(Mentor is Sorrelscar)*

Queens:

Badgerfur- Black and white she-cat with pale amber eyes *(Expecting Embermask's kits)*

Elders:

Streamheart- A slender pale ginger tabby she-cat with blind green eyes

Oatstep- A golden tabby tom with hazel eyes

Shadowclan:

Leader: Mintstar- A thick furred dark gray she-cat , pale green eyes

Deputy: Ottertail- A big brown and black striped tom with black paws, amber eyes

Medicine cat: Tawnyclaw- A dark ginger she-cat with black stripes, yellow-green eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Berryfur- A thick furred silver and black striped tom , pale green eyes.

Warriors:

Aspenshade- A dark blue-gray tom with amber eyes and a scarred pelt.

Thistlejaw- A broad shouldered blue-gray tom with yellow eyes.

Leopardwhisper- A black tom with darker spots with one amber eye and one yellow eye.

Crowstrike- A long furred dark gray tom with white markings and green eyes

Dovedapple- A pale brown and silver tabby she-cat , with blue-green eyes.

Whirlsplash- A big pale gray spotted tabby she-cat with black patches, with blue eyes.

Marshfoot- A long furred brown tom with black paws and pale yellow eyes

Ebonyfern- A dark gray tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Swiftflower- A sleek pale gray and black dappled she-cat with hazel eyes.

Apprentices:

Breezepaw- a small gray dappled she-cat with hazel eyes *(Mentor is Ebonyfern)*

Newtpaw- a dark brown tom with black tipped ears and a light brown muzzle, golden eyes *(Mentor is Leopardwhisper)*

Fogpaw- a gray tabby tom with amber eyes *(Mentor is Dovedapple)*

Queens:

Elders:

Jaggedfang- A thin tawny tom with a scarred face and a fang resting over his lower lip.

Thunderclan:

Leader: Oakstar- A pale brown tom with white ears and a white muzzle, light blue eyes.

Deputy: Sparrowstrike- A dark brown and white she-cat with dappled fur, green eyes.

Medicine cat: Tigerfrost- A long furred blue-gray tabby tom with white markings, black ears and amber eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Ashbreeze A gray tabby tom with three legs and amber eyes

Warriors:

Hollowpelt- A red-brown and black she-cat with black patches and green eyes

Emeraldtalon- A brown spotted tabby tom with black ears, brilliant green eyes

Minnowthroat- A long furred pale gray tabby tom with a white patch on his throat and yellow eyes

Brackendusk- A dark brown she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Creektail- A sleek white tabby tom with hazel eyes

Plumfur- A dark gray she-cat with lighter spots and blue eyes

Nightleaf- A gray she-cat with black paws and amber eyes

Apprentices:

Mothpaw- A slim brown she cat with a long black tail and blue eyes *(Mentor is Creektail)*

Nettlepaw- A brown and cream colored she-cat with yellow eyes *(Mentor is Emeraldtalon)*

Lizardpaw- A brown tom with lighter paws and a thin tail with green eyes *(Mentor is Minnowthroat)*

Riverclan:

Leader: Tanglestar- A dark ginger spotted she-cat,amber eyes.

Deputy: Blizzardleaf- A big white tom with silver paws and amber eyes

Medicine cat: Lilywhisker- A light brown she-cat with a white underbelly, yellow eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Sheepbounce- A long furred white she-cat with yellow eyes

Warriors:

Sunsong- A golden-brown and white tom with amber eyes

Spiderstripe- A cream colored she-cat with black stripes and amber eyes

Timbercloud- A dark gray tom with hazel eyes

Cherrypool- A ginger she-cat with white markings and blue eyes

Waspflight- A golden tabby tom with a black tipped tail and amber eyes

Mossypelt- A long-haired light brown she-cat with green eyes

Stonebranch- A silver tabby tom with golden eyes

Blackear- A sleek dark ginger tom with black ears

Apprentices:

Finchpaw- A gray-brown dappled she-cat with pale green eyes *(Mentor is Blizzardleaf)*

Cats Outside the Clans:

Pandora- A calico she-cat with ice blue eyes and a collar.

Chapter 14

Adderstorm made sure that the blood was completely out of his fur before he took one pawstep into the camp. The morning sun reflected off of the white surface of the moor, causing the snow to sparkle like glittering jewels. However, the snow next to the camp entrance was stained with pinks and reds from the blood of the battle last night.

Both Hollywish and Robinbriar avoided him after his outburst with Sunsong. They went back into the camp to sleep as soon as the first light of dawn approached over the horizon.

Cats stared at him as he tiredly made his way to the warriors den. He was quickly stopped by Palespeck who didn't look like she'd forgiven him at all. Who could blame her? Attacking Sunsong like that was uncalled for, even if RiverClan had planned on attacking the camp directly.

"Heronstar wishes to speak with you in his den, Adderstorm."

The deputy's yellow gaze was sharp like claws. Adderstorm glanced down at his paws shamefully. He wanted to apologize, but nothing would make this right. Sunsong could be dead because of him for all he knew.

He kept his head lowered when he walked into Heronstar's den and sat down, not saying a word. The pale gray tom approached him without hesitation, "Adderstorm, what you did last night went against the Warrior Code"

"I know Heronstar. And there's nothing I can do to make up for that. I've already failed you as a warrior" Adderstorm timidly replied. He'd never been in a battle before, he had no idea that he could even feel that amount of rage.

Heronstar's ears flicked in surprise, "You must understand, Adderstorm. Plenty of cats go through this. It was your first battle,

and from what I hear you were protecting Hollywish. I do not think you're evil. However, you won't go unpunished and you need to learn how to control your emotions during a battle"

Control my emotions. Can the feelings I had even be *controlled? I felt like I couldn't stop.*

"I'll do my best, I promise. But Heronstar, I also wanted to ask you something." Adderstorm didn't dare to lift his head up. If his mother did something horrible to WindClan, surely Heronstar would think even less of him then he did right now.

"Did you know a she-cat by the name of Hawkeyes?"

Heronstar's tail bristled slightly, but he remained calm and collected in front of Adderstorm, "Hawkeyes was exiled WindClan seasons ago for attempting to kill one of our warriors; which just so happened to be her former mate, Darksmoke."

Was he possibly my father? That would explain why I never saw him when I was a kit.

"Streamheart was his mate after Hawkeyes was exiled. Poor Streamheart was traumatized after finding his body in the creek." Heronstar continued, tilting his head slightly, "Why were you asking?"

Adderstorm felt frozen in place when Heronstar asked him that question. Surely he'd understand that he wasn't like his mother, right? Though, if word of this got out to his Clanmates he doubted they would have the same thought. They were already wary of him for being a rogue and attacking Sunsong mercilessly.

"H-Hawkeyes was my mother. B-but I swear I never knew she did this until now, Heronstar!" he stuttered. His heart pounded in his chest with fear of what the WindClan leader would say.

You mouse-brain! You should have just kept it to yourself! You're risking getting thrown out of the Clan--

To his disbelief, the gray leader's blue eyes shined in awe, "So you're one of her kits. Thank StarClan you survived!"

"W-wait...you're not angry?" Adderstorm blinked in confusion, "I'm the kit of a cat who betrayed your Clan"

Heronstar purred in amusement and gave the top of Adderstorm's head a small, comforting lick.

"Nonsense, Adderstorm. I'm thrilled to know that you lived, I was only deputy at the time when your mother was cast out. The only worries I had was that she was pregnant with Darksmoke's kits. I even begged Rainstar to reconsider and let Hawkeyes stay to deliver the kits in camp."

Adderstorm's mind swirled with an overwhelming mix of relief and appall. His mother had killed his father. His father had gotten her pregnant, yet went off with another she-cat. Were either one of his parents decent?

"You became a strong warrior of WindClan, Adderstorm. Your mother and father's actions do not define who you are and what you will become. What happened last night was just the heat of the battle, you'll learn not to let yourself fall victim to brutish instincts unless it's necessary."

Adderstorm nodded at his leader respectfully. He was going to do the best he could for his Clan, this was only his first day as a warrior. Even though sleep beckoned him to the warriors den, he wanted to go run across the moor.

"Ah, I haven't said what your punishment is going to be. Hm..replace the moss in the nursery and elders den. You can go on a hunting patrol later"

Not much of a punishment, but I won't complain.

"I promise you, I'll do better in the next battle, Heronstar." He vowed, and finally lifted his head up when he padded out of the den. The snow beneath his paws sent chills through his body, but he was thankful that it wasn't snowing more, and even more thankful that Heronstar didn't get angry at him.

I know now what my mother did. I can finally relax about it.

Only he couldn't relax. His mother had always been so kind towards him, until the day she got the illness that had killed her. That's when she turned delusional and had big differences in her moods. In only five heartbeats she could turn from calm to threatening, or to miserable.

It had scared Adderstorm out of his pelt the first time she'd acted like that. She started spatting out compete nonsense, only now Adderstorm realized it wasn't nonsense. She was speaking of Darksmoke and Streamheart, how she was banished from the Clan she was born in. How betrayed she'd felt.

Hawkeyes was truly a unique warrior to be in WindClan. Usually cats of WindClan were sleek and thin, his mother had long fur and was as burly as a ShadowClan cat. No WindClan warrior on their own was a match for her, Darksmoke didn't have a chance against her.

I must have gotten my father's build. I'm nowhere near as muscular as my mother was.

Silveroak trudged out of the medicine cat den looking exhausted. The she-cat still had no apprentice, and after the battle with RiverClan a lot of cats were injured. He pulled a mouse out of the fresh-kill pile and offered it to the silver and white she-cat.

"Oh..thank you Adderstorm," Silveroak mewed weakly, prodding the mouse with her paw, "But you should bring that to Pebblepaw. She needs to keep her strength up"

Adderstorm's fur stood up in anxiety, "What's wrong with Pebblepaw?" In all the excitement of the battle, Adderstorm had hardly paid any attention to the cats who got severely injured.

"She twisted one of her front legs. She'll be fine, she's better off than Sorrelscar and Webcloud at least. Speaking of, could you get some prey for them as well?"

Adderstorm felt a wave of relief to hear that the young apprentice was going to be okay. He would pray to StarClan that Sorrelscar and Webcloud would recover too. Sniffing the fresh-kill pile, he

chose a lark and a vole for the two warriors.

"You look like you need moons of sleep, Silveroak. Why don't you find someone to assist you for the time being?" Adderstorm followed the she-cat and carried the prey into the medicine den. The scent of herbs and blood stung in his nose; for once he was sincerely glad he didn't take up the offer to be a medicine cat apprentice.

"Palespeck has been helping, I simply told her to go rest for a bit" Silveroak nosed the mouse over to Pebblepaw. The mottled brown apprentice's front left leg was outstretched to avoid moving it; other than that she looked perfectly healthy.

His eyes moved to Sorrelscar, the older she-cat's flank was covered in bloodied cobwebs and her belly had a deep gash. Both of Webcloud's ears were torn and fresh claw marks went from his shoulder all the way down to his paw.

Adderstorm winced in sympathy. Both of these warriors had fought bravely, but had suffered the consequences. Sorrelscar was a senior warrior, nearly ready to retire to the elders den; and her wounds didn't look like they were making any progress to heal. RiverClan would pay for their attack on WindClan, it was only a matter of time.

How ironic is it that I'm *worried about a warrior dying from the battle? I practically killed one just outside the camp! RiverClan must be even angrier at us than before and it's all my fault.*

"I should go fetch moss for the elders and Badgerfur. May StarClan be with you all." Adderstorm meowed softly and strode out of the den. WindClan stored their dry bedding in a hollowed pine log just outside of camp; a nice stroll by himself would clear his mind.

As soon as he spotted the fallen tree he bounded up to it and stood on top, looking out over the snow-covered moor. He already missed the soothing rustle of wind-blown grass and the smell of fresh flowers. Leaf-bare was harsh on WindClan territory, the other Clans had more trees to shelter them and their prey.

Adderstorm let out a small sigh, hopping to the open area of the log to retrieve clumps of moss. However, he started to feel dizzy. The world felt like it was spinning around him even when he was frozen to the ground, not daring to move. His skull felt like tiny sharp claws were digging into it and his breathing was loud and rapid.

What's happening to me?! Oh great StarClan I'm dying! I'm going to die!

Warmth suddenly washed over his body, relaxing him enough to where he had the courage to open his eyes. Instead of being on the snowy ground, staring at the log as he expected to be doing, he was in the middle of a moor. No snow covered the grass beneath his paws, but instead both the ground and sky were littered with stars.

"Adderstorm." a she-cat's voice called out to him.

The brown tabby tom whipped around to come face to face with a dark ginger she-cat with green eyes and stars in her pelt. His heart leaped into his throat when he realized who it was.

"S-Sorrelscar? Where am I?"

Sorrelscar looked up at the moon, her tail curling around her paws. The she-cat looked as confused, if not more so than Adderstorm. And he could detect a small amount of sadness in her gaze, "StarClan. I've joined StarClan...they wanted me to deliver a message to you Adderstorm"

A message from StarClan? I thought that was all leader and medicine cat stuff.

"Be wary of who you trust, even the most loyal cats can stray from their Clanmates and the Warrior Code. If that loyalty is broken, innocent blood will be shed." Sorrelscar whispered to him.

Darkness clouded his vision and the warmth faded away into an icy numbness. Adderstorm awoke to realize that he had passed out in the snow. The sun was peeking out on the horizon, causing Adderstorm to scramble up to his paws.

I passed out and wasted the whole day away! I need to get the moss to the camp!

He stumbled closer to the log and grabbed the moss into his jaws. As he was running back to camp his mind raced with the thoughts over what he had experienced. He'd gone to StarClan and they gave him a message.

Or was it a prophecy? Why would StarClan give me a prophecy though? I'm not anything special. Maybe it was just some sort of weird dream I had because of exhaustion.

When he arrived to the camp entrance his stomach twisted into a knot when he saw Sorrelscar's body being placed down in the clearing to mourn. The reality of it all smashed into him like a boulder. Sorrelscar really *had* joined StarClan, which means his vision was real.

I really communicated with StarClan...and they were warning me about how I should be wary of who to trust or blood will be shed. Is someone in our Clan planning on betraying us? If so, who could it be?

Adderstorm glanced over at Redstripe. The older warrior was looking down at his mother's corpse, completely emotionless as he was when his brother, Pineblaze died. After that day, Adderstorm had an uneasy feeling whenever he would have to patrol with him.

He swallowed nervously when the warrior's yellow eyes looked directly into his. Adderstorm quickly walked to the nursery with the moss dangling from his jaws.

I'll just need to keep a closer watch on him. On every cat in the Clan for that matter, there could be more. I should tell Heronstar and Silveroak about it at least, they deserve to know as such important cats in the Clan.

Guess I'm not a useless warrior after all.

Chapter 15

Thistlejaw traipsed through the powdery snow, sniffing the air for any signs of prey. Sunlight peeked from the gray clouds and sent rays of light through the tree branches. All was peaceful until a sudden gust of cold air blew against his fur, causing him to shudder in response.

Must be near WindClan's border. Still don't understand how cats could stand to live out in the open.

He had not spoken to anyone about the prophecy he received that one night. If his mother personally came to him in a dream, why would he bother telling another cat? Especially when she was warning him to be wary even of his own Clanmates.

It had caused him to feel incredibly on edge. To think that one of his fellow warriors would betray ShadowClan one day, was a heavy burden to carry on his shoulders. And to top it off, the nightmares never ceased. He was back on a nightly dosage of poppy seeds before he went to sleep, much to Tawnyclaw's concern.

A crack of a branch near a blackberry bush caught his attention and he lowered himself to the ground. His ears were perked up high to catch any other noises as he slowly approached the bush.

His nose filled with the scent of a mouse. Though it would only make a meal fit for one cat alone, Thistlejaw wasn't going to let the opportunity for fresh prey to pass. He also loved the thrill of hunting and the satisfaction of bringing something to his Clan.

A yowl of distress broke his concentration and the mouse scurried off into a hole near a tree. Thistlejaw made an attempt to pounce on it before it reached it's tiny burrow, but it was too late.

"Fox-dung!" he cursed in irritation.

The yowl sounded more frantic the second time, and Thistlejaw begrudgingly padded toward the sound. When he reached the source of the yowling, he saw a dusty brown and white tabby tom on top of a large, rotten, fallen tree. The tom had wandered too far onto a branch and was dangling above the dark, roaring river.

Something clicked in Thistlejaw's mind and he realized that he recognized the WindClan cat.

"Adderpaw? What in StarClan's name are you doing?" Thistlejaw held back his snickering and stepped onto the tree to help out the tom.

"It's *Adderstorm* now. Just...s-shut your mouth and save me! I could drown!" the tabby's claws were burrowed into the dying bark of the tree. Thankfully, Thistlejaw could clearly see a way to drag the WindClan cat to safety.

"No kidding." He rolled his eyes and grabbed his jaws onto Adderstorm's scruff, dragging him off of the tree and onto the ground below. The tom made a cry of surprise when he lost his balance and fell face-first into the snow.

Thistlejaw let out a chortle and jumped right beside him, "Wow, you WindClan cats have no sense of balance do you? Or maybe you're just a clumsy cat in general"

Adderstorm lifted his head, his pale green eyes glaring at Thistlejaw. The young warrior hardly looked intimidating with white clumps of snow in his fur. More like a kit who was just out rolling in the first snowfall of Leaf-bare.

"Why were you climbing on the tree anyways? Aren't you rabbit-chasers scared of heights?" he purred teasingly and laid out next to Adderstorm. He knew the warrior didn't particularly enjoy being called a rabbit-chaser.

I don't mean any harm by it of course, I'm sure he knows that after the last time we met.

"I was following an injured raven, if you must know. Clans need all

the prey they can get in Leaf-bare." Adderstorm glanced over at the fallen tree, "Not that it was worth it. Thanks for saving me"

Huh? I wasn't really expecting any gratitude.

"You're...welcome?" Thistlejaw mewed, unsure if Adderstorm was truly grateful for his help.

Adderstorm's tail flicked and his white-tipped ears perked up in curiosity, "You seem surprised. Of course I'm thankful for you coming to my rescue, Thistlejaw. WindClan cats don't have many trees on our territory, therefore climbing is a skill we aren't advanced at." He shrugged, licking the bits of tree bark out of his fur.

"B-besides, I will confess I wasn't paying much attention to what I was doing when I was stalking that raven." The brown tabby lowered his head in embarrassment.

"We all can get distracted." Thistlejaw rested his paw on Adderstorm's front leg. The tabby tom seemed nervous and apologetic, even when it wasn't necessary. Does he live like this all the time? In a constant state of worry?

That must be tiring....though, I worry about my nightmares and now this prophecy, maybe I have more in common with him than I think I do.

Adderstorm went to shift away from Thistlejaw's paw, but instead his whiskers twitched nervously and he looked around their surroundings carefully. It eventually registered to Thistlejaw that he was looking out for any WindClan or ShadowClan warriors who might catch them talking to one another.

We aren't doing anything wrong, surely just simply talking with each other isn't against the Warrior Code? If not that, how would we be breaking it exactly?

He sniffed the air and felt his body go rigid with surprise. Right. He was over the WindClan border. That would definitely make things harder to explain to anyone who was patrolling the area.

"I should get back to hunting and return to camp. It was nice seeing

you again, Adderstorm" Thistlejaw purred calmly to the other tom. Adderstorm blinked at the sudden calmness in his voice and he nodded.

"I'll make sure to speak to you this time at the Gathering, Thistlejaw. And thanks again for saving me." Adderstorm dipped his head and bounded away from the border. He headed towards a pile of rocks, most likely to try to find more prey. Thistlejaw watched for a few more heartbeats before he leaped back into ShadowClan territory.

His ears perked up when he overheard approaching cats chatting among themselves. The sound of their pawsteps drew closer and a black spotted tom stepped out from the row of blackberry brambles.

Leopardwhisper! Oh great StarClan, did he see me with Adderstorm?

Newtpaw padded beside his mentor, his golden eyes narrowed when he noticed Thistlejaw standing at the river bank. Crowstrike and Berryfur trotted out as well, joining the other two cats quietly.

"Thistlejaw, what are you doing all the way out here by yourself?" Leopardwhisper approached him. His brother's different colored eyes bore into him suspiciously. Thistlejaw's fur bristled with unease.

"I'm a warrior now Leopardwhisper, can't I go hunting alone once in a while without being questioned like a kit?"

Berryfur was the first to respond to Thistlejaw's comeback. The silver and black tabby tom let out a snort of contempt before he spoke, "Sounds like you're trying to hide something. Not that I would be surprised if you were, you *have* always acted strange"

What is this? Why are they thinking I've done something horribly wrong? Even if I did tell them that I spoke to a WindClan warrior, it wasn't about anything important!

"Well, why are all of you out here? Shouldn't you be in camp or searching for herbs, Berryfur?" He questioned. He needed to remain

confident, Leopardwhisper was clever at reading cat's emotions. If he could somehow redirect his thoughts, he could possibly get away with none of them knowing he'd crossed the border.

"Berryfur *is* out searching for herbs. I thought it would be helpful for Newtpaw to know basic herbs in case he's ever without a medicine cat," Leopardwhisper looked over at the black and white warrior, "And we brought Crowstrike along to help patrol the borders while we search."

Thistlejaw felt the tenseness in his muscles drift away at Leopardwhisper's explanation. He awkwardly shifted his glance away from everyone, but the four cats still kept their eyes on him. His mind went back to the prophecy, which made his tension appear once again.

Maybe I should be the one suspicious of them. *But that's mouse-brained, the medicine cat apprentice wouldn't betray the Clan. He personally swore an oath to StarClan. It still doesn't change the fact that he's an irritating ball of fur though!*

"Sorry, you all can carry on. I should go back to camp---"

"Without any prey? Pft..how typical" Berryfur interrupted him. The silver tabby's green eyes glinted with mockery and he gestured with his tail for Newtpaw to follow him, "Over here Newtpaw, I think I spot cobwebs"

Why do you have to be such a pain in the tail? I haven't done anything to you! You're just judging me without any good reason!

Leopardwhisper stared at Thistlejaw as if he was still trying to figure out if he was lying or not. Then he suddenly walked past him to catch up with his apprentice and Berryfur. Crowstrike, being as silent as he had come, followed behind Leopardwhisper without a second thought.

I need to stop being so paranoid. I'll be as jumpy as Adderstorm by the time this is all over!

Thistlejaw purred to himself when he remembered the WindClan

warrior. He didn't have a best friend in ShadowClan, Ebonyfern came the closest, but she spent most of her time training Breezepaw. When he spoke to Adderstorm earlier, he'd felt a connection with him unlike anything he'd felt before in his life.

Despite the tom being from another Clan, he thanked him for his help. Thistlejaw helped his Clanmates just about daily and he almost never received a grateful response.

I wouldn't mind seeing him again.

For the first time since he was first apprenticed, Thistlejaw was excited to attend the next Gathering.

Chapter 16

"Cats of WindClan, tonight is the Gathering. And I realize we've all been wanting to know the explanation behind RiverClan's attack on us. We lost two brave and noble warriors; Sorrelscar and Webcloud. I assure you their deaths will not be in vain...I will speak to Smokestar and bring attention to the matter." Heronstar spoke from the top of Sky Stone, the warriors sat beneath, taking in his words in solemn silence.

Adderstorm watched Hollywish nuzzling against Robinbriar's shoulder. The jealousy he had for the two had diminished over the past moon. Instead it was replaced by the joy that his friend had found happiness in being with another cat. They weren't officially mates yet, but every member of WindClan could tell that they would soon announce it.

Besides, Robinbriar has lost most of his kin. Only Redstripe is alive and he rarely speaks to anyone at all, let alone his younger sibling. I think Robinbriar needs *some comfort.*

"However, we must ask all of you to be patient and cooperative. We do not want to start another fight, we only want to negotiate. If any cat stirs up trouble it's going to result in punishment. More properly known as apprentice duties." Palespeck interjected.

Her voice was stern as she looked down upon her Clanmates. And her gaze set on Adderstorm the longest, making him feel the need to shrink down to the size of an ant.

She's been like this ever since the RiverClan attack. Suspicious of me and strict towards everyone in the clan. I miss when she acted kind and calm.

"Redstripe, Adderstorm, Hollywish, Robinbriar, Embermask and Frostpaw. You're all attending the Gathering tonight" the WindClan

leader listed the names. A wave of relief fell over Adderstorm at the mention of his own name, he thought after what he did to the RiverClan warrior he'd surely stay behind.

Now I'll get to talk to Thistlejaw again! I wonder how he's been since the last time we spoke. I can't thank him enough for saving my life that day at the river.

Frostpaw's ears perked up with excitement before he saw his sister out of the corner of his eye at the mouth of the medicine cat den. This was the apprentice's first time attending the Gathering, but he'd have to do it without Pebblepaw. Her leg was still healing from the battle and their mother Starlingwing was hardly going to let her travel all the way to Four-Boulders.

The young, white tom padded over to Pebblepaw and pressed his face against her shoulder in an apologetic manner, "I'll tell you everything about it when I get back, I promise." He mewed to her. Pebblepaw simply nodded, clearly still disappointed she wasn't going herself.

Adderstorm looked away from the two apprentices. He felt sorry for Pebblepaw, but he knew that the apprentice would certainly attend the next Gathering. Though, with tensions so high between WindClan and RiverClan, perhaps the next Gathering wouldn't be as exciting as this one.

The thought then occurred to him, what if the RiverClan cats tried to attack them because of what *he* did? After all, no cat had any idea if Sunsong was alive and well. The attack may have been uncalled for, but he kept up his brutal attack on the warrior going after RiverClan retreated.

His stomach churned with anxiety as all the thoughts of different scenarios happening at this Gathering popped into his head. Before he could change his mind and stay at camp, the group started to wander out of the camp entrance.

Adderstorm followed behind Hollywish while Robinbriar glanced back at him with a slight hint of annoyance in his gaze, "You better keep quiet when we get there Adderstorm. After what you did to

Sunsong, those RiverClan warriors will want to rip your pelt right off"

Hollywish nudged the dark brown and ginger tom's shoulder immediately, "Quit it, Robinbriar. He made a mistake, there's no need to shove it in his face. I'm sure he's already well aware that he needs to be careful about what he says tonight."

Adderstorm nodded in agreement. In fact, he was going to attempt to stay away from any RiverClan cats. He was just going to find Thistlejaw and talk with him, then go back to his Clanmates. No one needed to start up an argument, especially not him.

The journey to Four-Boulders was quiet, other than the whisper of wind in the trees above them as they approached the clearing. Clouds were rolling in, threatening another snowfall and to block out the moon.

As soon as they came within eyesight of the other Clans, he saw RiverClan warriors narrow their eyes at them. Frustration boiled in his chest, why should they be angry? WindClan was only defending themselves. RiverClan were the ones who planned on unleashing an attack right on their camp!

If me, Hollywish, and Robinbriar weren't having our vigils that night, the Clan would've never seen it coming. We were lucky to have only lost two *warriors!*

"You twig-legged mouse-hearts have some nerve strolling out here like you own this territory." A cream colored she-cat with black stripes hissed at the WindClan group as they were passing by to take their places below the Four-Boulders.

"What in StarClan's name are you talking about? Oh, what? We're not allowed to *walk*?" Robinbriar huffed, not a bit amused by the RiverClan warrior's taunt. Hollywish swiftly bumped him along, forcing him to keep padding forward.

So much for him not wanting to stir up trouble.

More RiverClan cats turned their heads, suddenly Adderstorm was wishing he could just turn invisible to their eyes. He silently prayed to StarClan that no cat would notice that he was the one who attacked Sunsong, keeping his gaze focused to the ground as he kept walking.

ShadowClan scent wafted through the air, causing Adderstorm to lift up his head and search for the blue-gray tom. He attempted to weave through the crowd of cats as quickly as he could, but ended up with his face pressed against a black spotted tom's fur.

The tom let out a hiss and took a step away from the WindClan warrior. Adderstorm was surprised to see the ShadowClan warrior had two different colored eyes, one amber, another was yellow. Both were cold and piercing. However, before either of them could speak a word, Thistlejaw trotted over and let out a friendly meow to Adderstorm.

"Oh good, Adderstorm, looks like you made it. Erm--this is my brother Leopardwhisper." He nervously glanced at the black tom, then back to Adderstorm.

His brother looks like he wants to eat my heart. Why in StarClan's name does he seem so angry? To make matters worse, Leopardwhisper said nothing to him. The black tom just flicked his tail and brushed past Adderstorm; leaving the brown tabby feeling awkward in front of Thistlejaw.

"Don't mind him, he doesn't like to speak with many cats. He hardly even talks to me and I'm his sibling" Thistlejaw sat down comfortably in front of him, "So what's happened since we've last spoke? Fallen into any more rivers chasing after ravens?" The blue-gray tom chuckled softly, curling his tail around his paws.

Adderstorm's ears pinned down in embarrassment at the memory of him dangling from the tree branch and mewling like a helpless kit.

"It's been difficult, what with Leaf-bare still baring down on us, but we'll push through it. You never mentioned you had a brother." Adderstorm avoided the whole subject, best not to spread the news that RiverClan had attacked them. Heronstar and Palespeck would

handle the matter. He wasn't going to chatter on endlessly about it to a ShadowClan warrior, friend or not.

"To be fair, we haven't had much time to speak alone. Leopardwhisper and my father Aspenshade are the only kin I have in ShadowClan. My mother died when I was only an apprentice." Thistlejaw's voice trailed off when he mentioned his mother, his yellow eyes filling with sorrow at the memories.

Adderstorm felt a ache of empathy in his chest. He remembered how he felt when his mother died right before his eyes. Despite what he knew now about her, the pain of her being gone still remained. She may have stirred up trouble in WindClan and killed his father, but she still fought her hardest to take care of him, up until the day she became too ill to take care of *herself*.

The brown and white tabby tom pressed his face into Thistlejaw's shoulder. The muscles of the ShadowClan warrior instantly tensed up at the physical contact. Adderstorm didn't let that stop himself from comforting the blue-gray warrior.

"I know how it feels, Thistlejaw. To lose your mother---"

"Please don't..."

"Don't what?" Adderstorm pulled away to lock his pale green eyes with the other's yellow ones. Thistlejaw looked shaken by the fact Adderstorm even made an attempt to talk with him about the subject.

"Don't take pity on me. I realize I'm not the only cat who's lost their parent. I'm not special, you shouldn't treat me as if I'm still grieving." The blue-gray tom gritted his teeth, his claws flexing into the snow.

Adderstorm studied Thistlejaw's gaze for a moment before mewing softly, "Are you not? From what I'm seeing, Thistlejaw, you haven't properly let go of your grief"

Thislejaw's eyes started watering with tears, and he quickly shut them tightly before any spilled onto his cheeks. The tom took a

shaky breath, "Adderstorm, I can't talk about this. Not here, not now."

Why is he so afraid of letting other cats see how he feels?

"Maybe...I can meet you at the border tomorrow? At where the creek empties into the river, by the big oak tree." Thistlejaw whispered so no other cats could overhear their conversation. Adderstorm's mouth fell wide open with shock, had the ShadowClan warrior seriously suggested they meet in secret?

What do I even say to this? Well, obviously I should either agree or reject the offer. Oh for StarClan's sake, why do I always get myself into situations where my loyalty is tested?

"I-I...don't know about this Thistlejaw, what if someone finds out?" He meowed in a hushed whisper as well, his pelt bristling with worry. The other tom appeared to be startled by Adderstorm's reaction and he brushed his tail against his shoulder to calm him.

"You don't have to, Adderstorm. I'm not forcing you into any situation you feel uncomfortable in, but it's not as if we're betraying our Clans. We'll only be talking about *our* lives. Not our Clan secrets, not sharing prey, we don't even have to cross borders."

Adderstorm's heart pounded in his chest, his thoughts were racing faster than a hummingbird. Thistlejaw was right, they wouldn't technically be breaking the Warrior Code as long as they stuck to strict rules when they met up.

If either of us do any of the things he listed, we'll stop meeting. Besides, he might only want to meet up once.

"Alright, I'll meet you there tomorrow during sunset?" Adderstorm's white-tipped ears perked up. The anxiety he previously felt slowly faded away when Thistlejaw let out a deep purr of gratification.

"Thank you, Adderstorm. I wouldn't offer to do this with any other cat, not even in ShadowClan. Every cat just seems to either think I'm plotting against them, or they act like I'm invisible and aren't thankful for the things I do. There's no in-between." Thistlejaw

mumbled, glancing over at his chatting Clanmates.

Adderstorm opened his mouth to reply to the blue-gray tom, when Mintstar announced the start of the Gathering. Immediate disappointment washed over him when he realized he had to go back to sit with his Clan. He enjoyed speaking with Thistlejaw and was glad that he didn't back down from his suggestion to meet the next day.

Thistlejaw bumped Adderstorm's cheek with his muzzle playfully, "I'll see you around, rabbit-chaser."

"Y-yeah...bye, Thistlejaw" Adderstorm felt as if his paw-pads were on fire from the warrior's affectionate gesture and tone. He only hoped that none of the other Clans or his Clanmates witnessed it; as he padded his way through to his fellow WindClan members. He settled next to Hollywish, but made quite sure that he wasn't too close as to make Robinbriar paranoid.

When he looked up at the towering Four-Boulders, he was astounded to realize that Smokestar no longer was sitting next to the other three leaders. Instead, it was Tangleflame, the former Clan deputy. In RiverClan's deputy position underneath the boulders sat a large white tom with silver paws, and bright amber eyes.

Both of them look incredibly intimidating. I hope Heronstar can get this resolved tonight. At least the other clan leaders can weigh in on the matter.

"Who would like to start?" the old, dark gray she-cat turned her head to the other three leaders.

Heronstar immediately stood up, facing the crowd of cats below him, "I would like to, Mintstar. WindClan has an important issue that we need to address directly to RiverClan. Tanglestar, you attempted to attack our camp a half-moon ago. However, you never gave a reason and I have a right to know what it is."

Mintstar and Oakstar glanced at the new RiverClan leader warily, awaiting the answer. The dark ginger spotted she-cat only scoffed, lashing her tail angrily, "How dare you accuse us of such a thing?

We've been mourning the death of Smokestar this past moon! You really believe that I'd risk my warrior's lives on a raid of your camp?"

"Liar!"

Adderstorm whipped his head to see which of his Clanmates was brave (or mouse-brained) enough to argue with a clan leader. To his surprise, Redstripe was glaring up at the dark ginger leader, his yellow eyes narrowed into slits.

"I saw you that night, I'm sure more cats did as well. You were the one who told your warriors to retreat. There's no use in denying what we know is the truth!"

The white tom at the base of the boulders hopped up to join Tanglestar's side. He leaned in and murmured something quietly into her ear, she sighed and nodded. All the cats in the clearing were speaking in concerned, bewildered whispers.

"Tanglestar, I mean no disrespect on your clan. If you just admit that you did plan the attack and give the reason why, then we can move on. Try my patience again and perhaps I'll have to take more serious measures with you." Heronstar kept his voice as calm as always, but Adderstorm could clearly sense the lingering hostility that was underneath.

"It was Smokestar's dying wish for RiverClan to *destroy* WindClan!" Tanglestar declared.

Chapter 17

"Destroy WindClan!?" Oakstar's blue eyes widened with alarm, "Why would Smokestar ever suggest such a thing? She was always so peaceful and reasonable!"

Mintstar nodded in agreement, while Heronstar simply stared at Tanglestar, his jaw agape at the startling news.

"When StarClan cats came to take her away, she mentioned that they said a cat from WindClan is not to be trusted and that they will cause the destruction of all Clans if they are not stopped," Tanglestar explained, "You may think what you wish about my leadership skills, but I did it for the good of all of us. Why would we want to keep potential traitors in our midst?"

Adderstorm couldn't believe what he was hearing. Did all of RiverClan really want to destroy them? Or were they too afraid to oppose their own leader?

Or maybe this has something to do about the prophecy StarClan gave me. 'Be wary of who you trust, even the most loyal cats can stray from the Warrior Code. If that loyalty is broken, innocent blood will be shed' *it definitely sounds like an addition to it. Even more specific, the cat is or will be in WindClan.*

His gaze shifted to the mass of RiverClan warriors. His heart leapt into his throat when he noticed that Sunsong was among them.

The golden-brown tom's thick pelt didn't have the normal shimmer that it did before. Instead, his fur was torn up. Scars covered his back, chest, and face. He hardly looked like a young warrior anymore.

And that's all my fault. I'll never be able to truly apologize for what I've done to him. Especially now that Tanglestar wishes to destroy our clan.

Silveroak was the first WindClan member to speak, while Heronstar was still in a flood of silence. Adderstorm felt his leader's inner turmoil, how does any cat react to such a statement from a rival Clan?

"StarClan told Smokestar that only *one* cat from WindClan is not to be trusted. Why punish the rest of our clan for that? Surely you're not that much of a tyrant, Tanglestar." The silver and white medicine cat's voice was cold, but precise.

The crowd of cats silenced for a moment, focusing on what the medicine cat would say next on the situation. Adderstorm's tail twitched with anticipation, however his belly rumbled with fear.

Is Silveroak allowed to say anything about this directly to Tanglestar? Sure, she's a medicine cat but she's not the leader or deputy!

"Because you WindClan cats are too prideful for your own good! If I tell you whom I suspect is your traitor I highly doubt you will exile them, just for the sheer fact that you don't want to lose more warriors. Don't think we all haven't noticed your dwindling numbers." Tanglestar sneered down at Silveroak, her lips drew into a snarl of contempt.

"Be that as it may," Palespeck interjected, "You cannot be the judge of our own warriors. You aren't in charge of WindClan. I can safely say that there's no cat in my clan that would be capable of such things."

The spotted dark ginger she-cat narrowed her amber eyes, staring down at the group of WindClan cats.

"Not even the cat that brutally attacked one of our newest warriors?"

Adderstorm bit his tongue to stop himself from letting out a strained mew of distress. He sank his claws into the earth below him, trying to slow down his rapid breathing. Hollywish's dark blue eyes caught his and she quickly scooted closer to him.

"Adderstorm, you need to try to remain calm. Getting worried like

that will only make you look more suspicious. The full moon is still visible, no cat can hurt you anyways." She whispered into his ear. Her warm tone made Adderstorm relax enough to exhale and nod.

Heronstar finally stood up, taking a step closer to face Tanglestar, "It was that cat's first battle. We've all made bad choices in our life, especially at a young age. Like my deputy said, you can't call that evidence when you do not personally know my warriors."

"He has a good point, Tanglestar. Can we lay this to rest until we actually need to worry about it? I'm quite sure that Heronstar would be able to spot a traitor in his clan.." Oakstar grumbled. The pale brown ThunderClan leader looked annoyed by the drama that was sparking between WindClan and RiverClan. At this point, Adderstorm didn't blame the tom one bit.

Tanglestar huffed in response, her fur was bristled up with rage, but she went quiet after Oakstar's request. The dark ginger she-cat ignored Heronstar for the rest of the Gathering; while Adderstorm sat and thanked StarClan that neither Sunsong or Tanglestar recognized him.

The morning after the Gathering in the WindClan camp was filled with tension. Cats shared tongues in their nests, speaking about how ridiculous Tanglestar's accusations were. Adderstorm still hadn't breathed a word about the prophecy to Heronstar or Silveroak. After the RiverClan leader had spoken of a warning very similar to his, he began to feel a twinge of guilt for keeping it to himself.

They both deserve to know. For the safety of my clan, I have a duty to inform them.

Adderstorm heaved himself up from the comfort of his warm nest and padded out to the snowy clearing. He spotted Heronstar lowly speaking to Palespeck, obviously not wanting the conversation to be heard or interrupted. The brown tabby instead headed to the medicine cat den.

Silveroak was hunched over Streamheart, the scrawny elderly she-cat was violently spasming and gasping for air. The sight made Adderstorm's green eyes widen with alarm, but he was far too shocked to say anything.

The elder's jolting movements began to cease, eventually her body went limp and her blind eyes were wide and glazed-over, more than usual. The whole den had become eerily quiet, Silveroak rested her paws over Streamheart's eyes and closed them.

"May you find good hunting, swift running, and shelter when you sleep. I'm sure Darksmoke will be happy to see you once again." Silveroak's mew was soft as she cleaned up Streamheart's fur.

I just saw Streamheart die right before my eyes! Poor thing didn't look as if she had a peaceful death either.

The medicine cat turned her attention to the young warrior. A startled look sparked in her icy blue gaze. Adderstorm quickly realized he hadn't made his presence known, of course she was going to react like that. He lowered his head apologetically and stepped further into the den.

He tried his hardest to distract himself from Streamheart's lifeless body, sticking close to the wall littered with spaces for herb storage.

"I am sorry you had to witness that, Adderstorm." Silveroak's voice had a slight shakiness to it. The white spotted she-cat slowly walked over to the herb storage wall and took out a small bundle of lilac flowers. The scent of the pale purple flowers was sweet and strong, yet it strangely left his nose with a slight burning sensation.

He shook his head at Silveroak's statement, "There's no need to apologize. Ever since I joined WindClan, I've seen death. Not to be disrespectful or anything, but I'm used to it."

Silveroak placed the lilac next to Streamheart's body. A sorrowful sigh left her mouth, "As am I...if I could fix it, I would. At the very least, I'd stop the needless deaths from battles and starvation."

His tail twitched nervously. He was starting to think that maybe this wasn't the best time to bring up the prophecy after all. Silveroak was busy preparing for Streamheart's vigil, and she was clearly shaken up about the whole thing. Heronstar was probably focused on what to do with RiverClan.

No! WindClan needs this information. It will *confirm Smokestar's warning from StarClan, but it will help us be much more vigilant of who's going to betray us!*

"Silveroak, I realize that this may not be the appropriate time or place to tell you this, but StarClan gave me a prophecy the day after RiverClan's attack---"

"*What?* " Silveroak cut him off, her voice was steadier now. Steady but demanding at the same time. It reminded him vaguely of how Heronstar spoke. Her eyes were narrowed into icy slits, "You received a *prophecy* and only bothered to inform me right now?"

A lump made its way into Adderstorm's throat and his mew was hushed into a whisper, "I-it wasn't the best decision on my part, I know that. Sorrelscar came to me after she died that day and told me to, *'Be wary of who you trust, even the most loyal cats can stray from the Warrior Code. If that loyalty is broken, innocent blood will be shed'* "

The medicine cat's sudden wave of superiority and irritation faded as soon as Adderstorm recited the prophecy. Her ears pinned back immediately, the fur on her spine also stood up. The young warrior took a step back in confusion, he hadn't expected that Silveroak would react like this at all.

Silveroak bounded out of the den entrance toward Heronstar and Palespeck, leaving Adderstorm speechless. He stepped out of the den as well, out of earshot of their discussion.

That whole conversation was ...strange. Silveroak really looks like she could use a good rest. Perhaps she's been too stressed lately and I brought even more stress on her. Oh StarClan, I hope she doesn't worry too much about all this. I only wanted to help!

Chapter 18

Dusk came upon the snowy moor as quickly as the day had passed for Adderstorm. Streaks of orange and purple danced across the clouds. The sun, now hardly visible over the horizon, was making its way for a chilly Leafbare night. Adderstorm strode across the snow, patches of it had melted away in the unusually warm sunlight that day. He had made the excuse of going on a late hunting trip to stretch his legs and keep an eye on the RiverClan border, but his heart thrummed with excitement at the fact he was going to meet up with Thistlejaw.

Another part of him felt fretful of any cat finding out about it, but as Thistlejaw had said, they weren't technically breaking any rules in the Code as long as they stuck to their own territories. And Adderstorm would still try to find prey for his clanmates on the way back to camp, as well as check along the RiverClan border for any trouble.

His legs started to tremble when he reached the towering oak tree. Across the ShadowClan border was the darkness of the pine forest. His imagination was starting to run wild as the fur on the back of his neck stood on end.

I feel like some invisible cat is watching me! How could any cat be comfortable living in such a place where you can hardly see around you?

The brown tabby tom sat underneath the oak tree and began to clean his fur while waiting for Thistlejaw's arrival. Doubt prickled in his mind, what if he wasn't going to show up? He'd be sitting near the ShadowClan border looking like a mouse-brain.

His ears perked up when the bushes on ShadowClan's territory rustled, and the sound of a snapping twig underneath paws caught his attention. Thistlejaw's thick, dark blue-gray fur blended in with the evening shadows, but his brilliant yellow eyes contrasted from

it. As soon as the ShadowClan warrior spotted Adderstorm, he came bounding over. When he was close enough, Adderstorm could practically feel the purrs coming from the tom's throat.

He had the sudden urge to bury his muzzle into Thistlejaw's shoulder but swiftly realized that if he came back to camp with the scent of a ShadowClan warrior all over his pelt, cats would figure it out eventually.

"You actually came.." Thistlejaw tentatively stepped up to the oak tree, but still kept to his side of the border. A hint of shock clouded over the blue-gray warrior's yellow eyes.

"Of course I did, I keep my word." Adderstorm nodded, relaxing as he curled his tail over his paws, "In any case, it's the least I could do after you saved me." The chill of a cold, Leafbare breeze nipped at his nose and ears, causing a shudder to ripple through his brown pelt.

"Like I said at the Gathering, most of my clanmates aren't the kindest cats toward me. It's a little strange that a WindClan cat is showing me more understanding than those who I was raised with." Thistlejaw glanced down at the snow-covered ground meekly. Though, meek wasn't the word Adderstorm would use to normally describe the ShadowClan tom.

"RiverClan is just paranoid. I do hope your clan doesn't get driven out, or worse." Thistlejaw added.

Adderstorm thought back on what happened at the Gathering, how enraged Tanglestar was. And persistent on the subject of destroying the clan he cared about. His claws flexed into the dampened ground near the base of the oak tree, "If they do try to attack, I'm going to fight as hard as I can to protect my clanmates."

Even if it means summoning that darkness I found in myself when attacking Sunsong.

The other tom's yellow eyes shined with admiration, "That's all well and good. But it's surprising, you usually act like a nervous mouse when we talk."

"I *am* most of the time, but it doesn't mean I'm going to let my fears get in the way of doing what's right." Adderstorm tilted his chin up, looking at the starry sky above them. Each of the dots of light glimmered, and witnessing the sheer amount of them made his heart feel heavier than usual.

So many lives lost over the generations of the Clans, I wonder what they think of me. The former rogue who became a warrior. The rogue who's mother murdered her own mate, betraying the very clan she was born in.

He snapped out of his thoughts when a sudden amount of warmth pressed against him. Adderstorm looked to the side, and when he finally processed that Thistlejaw was leaning against him, he tensed up.

"Y-you shouldn't be doing that..we'll get our scents all over each other!" He drew his ears back right away when he heard the words leave his mouth. He didn't mean to snap so sharply at the other tom.

Thistlejaw thankfully didn't seem phased by the little outburst, he instead nodded and shifted back away from Adderstorm. The blue-gray tom looked up at the stars and flicked his long tail. Even though the ShadowClan warrior didn't get angry at him, the silence was starting to make Adderstorm feel anxious and awkward.

The other tom eventually spoke in a low, hushed tone, "Sometimes I just wish that the Clans could all get along and work together. There are generations upon generations of cats up there, a lot of them died needlessly." Thistlejaw swallowed down a hint of grief in his voice, turning his head to Adderstorm.

"I understand that you feel that way, especially if you lost a clanmate close to you, but I've learned that the Clans don't see eye-to-eye on everything. What if coming together into one group would bring more conflict than peace?" Adderstorm stated, his whiskers twitching with intrigue at this conversation. It vaguely reminded him of the things Silveroak previously had spoken with him about.

It's interesting how both a ShadowClan warrior and a WindClan medicine cat can have similar views on how the Clans act towards each other in times of hostility.

"It would be difficult of course, every clan has their differences. We all have our own opinions, but you can't deny that things *could* be easier under one clan. Catching all sorts of prey from one big territory, having enough warriors to fight off danger, and enough medicine cats to heal others!" Thistlejaw's eyes had a glimmer of hope that soon faded as he let out a defeated sigh.

"You're right though, Adderstorm. The Clans more than likely wouldn't agree to something like that, no matter how nice it sounds."

The brown tabby shuffled his white paws against the patch of soil that peeked from under the snow, guiltily. He hadn't meant to dampen the other's spirits, only to speak the reality of it. He decided to keep quiet and not say anything more to upset him.

"Is everything alright, Adderstorm?" To the WindClan warrior's surprise, Thistlejaw didn't appear to be upset at all. Though, there was clear concern in his mew. Adderstorm's pelt bristled with embarrassment. In the process of trying to not make Thistlejaw feel uncomfortable, he'd made him think that something was wrong by being silent.

That's what I get for overthinking every little thing that happens. Adderstorm thought bitterly.

"Yeah, everything is fine, don't worry about it. Hey, let's do something more exciting than sitting around here like toads!" Adderstorm offered, hopping up to his paws. Thistlejaw looked surprised for a brief moment before he stood up as well.

"Like what?" The ShadowClan warrior didn't seem the least bit bothered by the cold breeze. More than likely a bonus for having a thick pelt. Meanwhile, Adderstorm was fighting the urge to have his teeth chatter.

Huh, good question. Didn't exactly think this one through...

Adderstorm looked around the area they were in and then back at the tree they were standing under. Despite how tall it was, there were still a few branches that were fairly low to the ground. The trunk of the oak tree was huge, with ridges that he assumed would be perfect for climbing.

"We could climb the tree." Adderstorm purred.

Thistlejaw's yellow eyes widened, "Woah, are you sure you want to do that? Don't get me wrong, I'm fine with climbing any day, but don't WindClan cats hate trees?"

Adderstorm let out a teasing scoff, his tail flicked up straight in the air, "Well, we do climb *once* in a while for leg strengthening, but most of our prey is on the ground. We have no need for hanging around on branches like bats!"

With an amused fanged grin, Thistlejaw nudged Adderstorm to the side and leapt onto the tree trunk, his claws dug into the bark. Once he settled on a ridge he used it as leverage, pushing with his hind legs to reach the first branch and he stood on it proudly.

"Are you sure you can make it up here? Or do I have to help you like last time so you won't fall?" The ShadowClan warrior teased, his whiskers twitched happily.

Adderstorm ignored Thistlejaw's teasing jabs for once, and examined the path the other warrior had taken up the tree. He took a deep breath, unsheathing his claws in preparation. He stepped back a few fox-lengths away from it so he could get a running start.

Then Adderstorm sprinted towards the oak tree, he squatted his hind legs down mid-run and hurdled himself upwards. The next thing he knew his claws were sunk into the thick bark of the tree. Adderstorm copied what Thistlejaw had done with the ridge he'd landed on and made it to the branch next to him.

"I think I'm fine on my own," Adderstorm replied simply. His pale green eyes were gleaming with complacency.

Thistlejaw sat down on the branch with his tail swaying below him, "Hm, so you are." His tone was a lot more relaxed now. Adderstorm looked down at the ground below, they were only on the first branch of the tree, but he already felt higher than he wanted to be.

He pushed the anxiety that was forming in his belly away and forced himself to look up at the night sky instead. They were lucky that this oak tree didn't belong to WindClan nor ShadowClan. It was located right in the middle of their territory borders, both Clans had the right to hunt or climb in it.

"So at the Gathering, you mentioned that your brother hardly talks to you. Do you know why he doesn't? I thought most littermates got along." Adderstorm turned his head to face Thistlejaw. The ShadowClan tom's ears went back in shock, as if he'd forgotten the reason why he wanted to meet with Adderstorm in the first place.

"Oh...erm..right. Well, Leopardwhisper and I *used* to get along fine until my mother died. After that, all he could think about was working towards becoming the best warrior in the Clan. He started hanging around our father, Aspenshade even if he was horrible to him." Thistlejaw looked out towards ShadowClan territory as he spoke.

"Aspenshade tried training me brutal battle techniques, fighting with claws unsheathed, but every time we trained I wouldn't want to. I was too scared, I didn't want to turn my grief into rage, so I guess I just...kept it locked up instead."

Adderstorm couldn't believe his ears, so all of this kin drama with his brother and father was purely because of his mother's death? Why would his father be so cruel to try and teach his own son by training with claws unsheathed?

His eyes glanced at the long, deep scar on the other tom's jaw. The scar he'd mentioned that he got from a climbing accident, but now Adderstorm couldn't help but wonder if he was hiding the truth about it from him.

"Have you tried telling Leopardwhisper how you feel about him ignoring you?" He tilted his head questioningly.

Thistlejaw lashed his tail in frustration, "He would think I'm softer than I already am if I brought it up. Kin isn't what Leopardwhisper considers a priority anymore, just fighting for his clan and acting suspicious at any given opportunity."

Acting suspicious? That doesn't sound like anything good, but I'm already prying into his life too much. We're still from separate clans, giving out too much information to the other is an invitation for disaster.

"I still think when the time is right, you should bring it up to him. If he doesn't care then so what? Just because he's kin doesn't mean you have to get along, you can find other cats who love and care about you more. Kin doesn't define itself as blood, kin can be good friends as well." Adderstorm insisted, his tail gently brushed against Thistlejaw's flank.

The blue-gray tom blinked with surprise and hummed with thought, "Huh, I never really thought of it that way. That's...a nice way of looking at it. I'm glad I met you Adderstorm, I really am." Thistlejaw pressed his muzzle against Adderstorm's shoulder. This time, he didn't flinch or pull away.

"I'm glad I met you too, Thistlejaw." Adderstorm purred, nuzzling him in return. With the warmth Adderstorm felt from pressing against Thistlejaw, he could barely remember the fact that it was Leafbare.

The two toms stayed on the oak tree branch until moonhigh. And when they eventually parted ways, Adderstorm ran across the moonlit moor, happier than he'd been in a long time.

Chapter 19

Thistlejaw made his way back to camp at a slow pace, his ears perked up to listen for any signs of prey he could take back after being out of the camp for so long. He paused when he heard the sound of two cats murmuring to each other. The voices were coming from the border near the Thunderpath and Twolegplace.

Hesitantly, he decided to walk closer to the border, making sure that his movements didn't make noise to attract any unwanted attention. As soon as he could spot two dark shapes of cats he carefully hid behind a cluster of trees and bushes, silently wishing that it was Newleaf so that there was more to hide him than the completely bare branches.

Thistlejaw sniffed the air quietly to pick up the scent of the two cats, but the slight breeze was blowing the opposite direction.

"I told you Pandora, everything will fall into place by this coming Greenleaf or sooner."

A sudden spike of shock prodded Thistlejaw's chest like a large thorn. He would recognize that voice anywhere. *It's Leopardwhisper! Who's Pandora? Clearly, they're not a clan cat. Why is he talking to them?*

"I know that you all need time to plan accordingly, but what about *me* Leopardwhisper? I want to stay by your side as your mate! Being away from you is proving more difficult these days." The other voice came from a she-cat.

His mate? Leopardwhisper is having relations with a cat outside the Clans? That really doesn't seem like something he'd do! He's so loyal to ShadowClan, but it does explain why he's been acting strangely these past moons.

Thistlejaw shifted his weight to his hind legs, ready to dart away if they spotted him. However, a part of him wanted to confront his

brother about it. He was breaking the Warrior Code, and if word of this got to Aspenshade he'd surely be punished far worse than anything Mintstar or Ottertail would do to him.

Then how do you explain what you did tonight with Adderstorm? You two were only supposed to chat at the border, not climb a tree and reveal your problems with your kin. And certainly, you weren't supposed to be sharing-tongues him like he was one of your own clanmates.

Leopardwhisper let out an irritated huff of breath, "You're not the one doing anything here, I think you can manage to be *patient* while I'm out here putting the plan into action!" His lips drew back into a small snarl at the she-cat.

Thistlejaw watched as Pandora's tail lashed, "I'm carrying your kits Leopardwhisper, I think you should stop with that arrogant attitude of yours. I don't have any obligation to join you or the others." She hissed lowly, taking a step towards Thistlejaw's brother.

The dark-spotted tom let out an amused meow, though it was more taunting than real amusement. His single yellow and amber eyes narrowed into menacing slits and he took a step towards Pandora as well. He began shoving her backward until her ears pinned back and she lowered to the ground submissively.

"You're right, you *are* carrying my kits. Kits that share *my* blood will be a great new addition to the clan, they'll help us grow stronger. But you're sadly mistaken if you think I need *you* to watch over them, there's plenty of competent she-cats that would love to raise my kits." He purred darkly, his muscles rippled underneath his black fur.

Thistlejaw's mouth was agape in utter dismay, he never thought his brother would talk to his mate like this. He always assumed despite his strength and ambition, Leopardwhisper would make a great father and mate. Now all he could see was Aspenshade residing in his brother.

What did he do to you? Where's the caring cat I once knew?

"You were a kind warrior when you met me, Leopardwhisper. What

happened to you? Was that all just a lie to get me to have your kits? Are you that much of a dog-heart?" Pandora's voice shook with fear and dejection. Thistlejaw wanted to rush over and protect the she-cat from his brother's cruelty, but he was afraid of the consequences.

He waited for Leopardwhisper's response, but the ShadowClan warrior remained silent as an owl taking flight. Pandora shook her head, her blue eyes shining with tears, "I thought you cared about me."

As Pandora shook her head, Thistlejaw heard a small tinkling sound coming from her. He focused his gaze and noticed the she-cat wore a collar, she was a kittypet! Thistlejaw assumed she would be a rogue by her daring personality to talk back to a cat who could easily rip her to shreds.

"I do care about you, I care about changing the Clans, it's a mess Pandora. I need to focus my attention on that for now. Our kits will play a vital role in helping with it. You understand don't you?" Leopardwhisper's voice lowered into a softer tone, one that sent chills down Thistlejaw's spine.

Changing the Clans...what exactly does he mean by that?!

"I suppose I do, but I want to be by your side and raise our kits as well." Pandora shuffled her paws, looking down at her belly, "Please don't take them from me, Leopardwhisper." She begged desperately.

The black tom studied the calico she-cat for a moment as if he was trying to figure out the exact right words to manipulate the poor thing more. It made Thistlejaw sick to his stomach to watch Leopardwhisper be such a snake. Pandora may be a kittypet, but she deserved to be treated better, especially when carrying kits.

"Then be patient about this and I won't have to," Leopardwhisper decided. His tail brushed her side as he walked past her, now facing the direction of ShadowClan camp. Thistlejaw ducked his head down, his chin was pressed firmly into the ground.

"You should go back to your Twoleg nest and rest, Pandora. I'll meet up with you when they're born."

Thistlejaw needed to get out of the area before his brother spotted him on his way back to camp. He slowly started to step backwards, glancing back in case any twigs were in his path. He wasn't even paying attention to Pandora's farewell, but as soon as he saw the shadowy figure of her leaping up to the edge of the Thunderpath, Thistlejaw began to panic.

He turned around and bolted through the forest. His whole body was shaking when he reached the camp entrance. When he realized he hadn't bothered to catch any prey his stomach churned even more with dread.

Please StarClan, don't let my clanmates be suspicious of me. The thought of that seemed too good to be true though.

Marshfoot stepped out of the camp entrance, his brown fur practically blended into the surrounding, shadowy brambles. His pale yellow eyes were wide with alarm when he spotted Thistlejaw, "Thistlejaw, what in StarClan's name happened? You look like you saw a pack of foxes!"

Thistlejaw awkwardly chuckled and lowered his head, "Erm, I think I was just spooked by a bat while hunting. Everything is fine, Marshfoot, sorry."

Better to look like a mouse-heart than a liar.

Marshfoot didn't seem to care, he simply let out an exhausted huff and padded back into the camp. Thistlejaw felt relief wash over his entire body and he followed the other warrior inside, his paws ached from all the running and climbing he'd done that night.

He carefully weaved his way through the sleeping warriors and settled into his nest. A tiny thought pricked at his mind.

You forgot to get poppy seeds from Tawnyclaw. Thistlejaw curled his tail in comfortably, with any luck he wouldn't need the poppy seeds because of how tired he was. Besides, Tawnyclaw and Berryfur were

sound asleep at this point.

Thistlejaw wanted to wait until his brother had returned to camp, but he figured if he was sound asleep in his nest that it would throw Leopardwhisper off a little if he suspected he was eavesdropping on the conversation with Pandora. Then his mind flashed back to the time he'd spent with Adderstorm and before he knew it he felt himself drift into a warm, comforting darkness.

A persistent paw prodded at the side Adderstorm's face, snapping him out of a deep sleep. He groaned in protest and tried curling into a tighter ball in his nest, but whoever was waking him up wasn't giving up so easily.

"Adderstorm, get up. You're on the dawn hunting patrol today." It took Adderstorm a moment to realize the cat who was speaking to him was his former mentor, Jaytuft.

The dawn hunting patrol? Great StarClan, if I would've known that before, I would have returned from my meet up with Thistlejaw sooner!

He forced himself up to his paws and shook the bits of various moss and feathers out of his pelt. The gray tortoiseshell tom stepped out of the warriors den alongside him and joined up stayed to the back of the patrol. Adderstorm slowly stumbled forward, blinking his fogged-up eyes. The blur of a black and white shape along with a smaller white and brown shape cleared up into the recognizable figures of Juniperlight and Frostpaw.

"Is this all who are hunting this morning?" Adderstorm wearily trudged to the camp entrance. Jaytuft's green eyes had a hint of confusion, of what Adderstorm could only assume was questioning why he was so tired. His former mentor didn't decide to comment on it though.

"Not usually a whole lot of prey first thing at dawn, still too cold, but the fresh-kill pile is quite low. We need all we can catch."

Juniperlight turned her sleek head to look back at the two toms,

"What we need is for all this snow to melt, I went out hunting yesterday and I only caught two scrawny mice! And Adderstorm went on his own hunting trip last night and didn't bring back anything." The she-cat's white-tipped tail flicked in irritation as she raked her unsheathed claws into the snow.

"If this continues, Badgerfur won't be able to produce enough milk to feed her kits when they're born."

Adderstorm opened his mouth to give a response to Juniperlight and reassure her that her sister would be alright, but he was interrupted by Heronstar.

"Adderstorm, me and Silveroak need to speak to you in my den. Redstripe? Take Adderstorm's place in the hunting patrol, please." Heronstar said, leading Adderstorm away from the group. He was wide awake now and trying to fight back the worry he felt.

Did he find out about me and Thistlejaw? Am I going to be kicked out of WindClan like my mom?

Silveroak was pacing back and forth near the back of Heronstar's den, the silver and white she-cat stopped abruptly when she heard Heronstar walk in. Her ice-blue eyes darted from Adderstorm to the WindClan leader, "It still doesn't make sense that you of all cats would receive a warning from StarClan, but it also explains why RiverClan wants to destroy us. If this warning is correct, we have a dangerous traitor in our midst."

Oh, this is about the prophecy...warning...or whatever exactly I received then? I've been trying *to figure out who could be a possible traitor in the Clan, even with Redstripe's constant intimidating personality, I still have second thoughts that he'd be the one behind such treachery.*

"I've been thinking that since Dustblaze's death, Silveroak. Too many of these deaths don't make any sense, it's about time we do something about it for the safety of WindClan." Heronstar agreed, his expression was more serious than Adderstorm had ever seen.

The brown tabby uncomfortably shifted his weight from paw to paw, "Erm, so why exactly am I here? I know StarClan told me, but

you two and Palespeck are more capable of handling this than I am"

Silveroak settled in front of Adderstorm, "I know you wish to lead a normal warrior life, Adderstorm. You made that quite clear when you decided to continue your warrior training instead of becoming my apprentice," a glimmer of disappointment shined in her blue eyes as she spoke, "But you must realize that this is an important matter, StarClan chose you for a reason. I requested to Heronstar that you go to the Mooncavern with me; perhaps we can get more answers."

The Mooncavern was where all the medicine cats gathered each half-moon to receive any guidance or prophecies from StarClan. Adderstorm's tail bristled with astonishment.

I knew this was an important matter, but I had no idea Heronstar and Silveroak would want to make me a part of it! I thought I was only the messenger...maybe I've stepped too deep into this, is there any way I could back out?

Both his leader and medicine cat were paused, waiting for Adderstorm's response. He started to stutter out nonsense, but Heronstar once again stepped in, "The loyalty of my warriors is essential, Adderstorm. We need you to do this to help WindClan. I can't have a cat running around thinking they can get away with these murders. Which means you can't tell any of your clanmates about this. Trust no one."

Guess not. He took a deep breath, he didn't even notice that his legs were starting to tremble with nervousness. *This is the chance I've been truly waiting for, a chance to prove to the clan that it doesn't matter where I came from. I'll soar above my mother's betrayal by finding another traitor within the clan and bring them to justice!*

"Alright, I'll do it, for the protection of WindClan."

Chapter 20

Silveroak and Adderstorm made the journey to the Mooncavern a quarter-moon after their discussion in Heronstar's den. Heronstar didn't want to draw the attention of any of the other Clan's medicine cats so he suggested they wait after the half-moon. The young warrior's paws itched with excitement when they started up the rocky hillside near ThunderClan territory. Though Adderstorm was excited and wanting to bounce around like a new apprentice, he was concerned about the she-cat who was slowly trailing behind him.

Silveroak has hardly spoken a word since we left camp. Adderstorm thought, but decided against bringing it up. *She's probably just focused on our task to get answers from StarClan.*

The medicine cat took the lead when they reached the top of the hill. She gestured with her snowy white tail for Adderstorm to continue following her into the entrance of the Moon Cavern. He was hesitant at first, fear swelling up in his chest as he stared into the cold, darkness.

Silveroak carefully padded down a path of rocks that perfectly led down into the cavern. Adderstorm panicked as the shadows seemed to swallow the medicine cat whole and he hurriedly caught up to Silveroak's side.

To his surprise, when they reached the bottom of the rocky steps and onto the stone floor, an aqua blue glow filled the cavern. Adderstorm blinked in bewilderment at the sight of small greenish-blue glowing mushrooms that were scattered along the cavern. His white-tipped ears pricked up when he noticed the sounds of dripping and running water.

"So this is where the medicine cats meet....I can see why it's sacred grounds. It's almost as if I'm dreaming!" Adderstorm exclaimed, still breathless with awe. Silveroak nodded in agreement, but clearly still in a serious mood with her lack of replying audibly.

The she-cat led him over to a pool of water in the far side of the cavern. Long and pointy rocks hung from the roof of the cavern like fangs, and a particularly large one rested above the middle of the pool which was surrounded by glowing mushrooms. The sharp rock was wet with water, causing droplets to drip down into the pool like raindrops. Very slow and tedious raindrops.

However, something still confused him, "Silveroak? I think I can hear rushing water, where is it?" the echoes in the cavern made the source of sounds difficult to pinpoint.

"Further into the cave, none of the medicine cats have investigated it yet, we'd rather not get lost in here. No one knows what kind of danger lurks deeper in this place.."

"Danger? You think there's something in here that could harm us?" Adderstorm's neck fur stood up immediately. Silveroak shrugged her shoulders, trotting up to the edge of the water.

"It's possible, yes. We don't live underground, how would we know if there were dangerous creatures down here or not? But, I wouldn't lose sleep over it Adderstorm. Several cats have come to the Moon Cavern over the many seasons, and as far as I know, nothing has attacked them." Silveroak mewed, her ice blue eyes narrowing after a few moments, "Enough gawking at everything though, we came here for a reason."

The she-cat dipped a paw into the water and Adderstorm instinctively felt a chill run down his spine to the tip of his tail at the realization that any water down here would surely be cold as ice. Silveroak drew her paw upwards and wiped her wet paw across her face as if she was washing it. Then she lapped at the water a few times, laying down after she did so.

Adderstorm copied the silver-and-white medicine cat. His teeth clenched together when his paw, which was warm from travel, enveloped in stabs of cold water. The brown tabby quickly withdrew it, rubbing it over his face as he leaned down to lap up the water. Before his tongue touched the surface however, he noticed Silveroak was fast asleep.

And a wave of paranoia filled Adderstorm's chest. It tightened like claws around his now rapidly beating heart. Something was urging him not to follow Silveroak into slumber, instead he backed away from the pool's edge, ears pinned back defensively.

A small part of Adderstorm mocked himself for acting like a mouse-heart. However, the other part of him was stronger, and it begged not to ignore the feeling, as if danger was lurking around every corner of the cavern. *Judging by what Silveroak said, that may be the case.* Adderstorm thought.

The shadows made Adderstorm feel much more uneasy, he expected anything to leap from them and attack him without having to make a sound. He glanced over his shoulder at Silveroak, who was still sleeping soundly. Adderstorm could admit, this place should be far from scary. The glow of the mushrooms and the reflection of light in the pool should be tranquil and calm him from the contrast of the darkness around them.

This is a place where medicine cats visit and it's the strongest physical StarClan presence with any living cat. StarClan wouldn't let anything bad happen to us in here, right? Adderstorm thought, though try as he might, his doubt trickled in.

At that moment, Adderstorm picked up the echo of a tiny rock fragment bouncing across the cave floor. He swiftly unsheathed his claws and backed up until he was in front of Silveroak's sleeping body. Before he could process what was happening, a heavy ball of fur and claws attacked him; and a battle yowl rang through the cavern.

His head bashed against the stone floor and claws sank into his cheek. Adderstorm looked up as he reared his hind legs, ready to strike against his attacker's belly. His stomach lurched when he recognized the cat against the greenish-blue glow.

Sunsong?! Did he follow us here? But I smell another cat too, who else is with him?

There was no time to dwell on his own thoughts. Adderstorm raked his back claws over Sunsong's belly, receiving a screech of pain in

return. He leapt to his paws, still dazed from the force when the RiverClan warrior pinned his head down.

"S-stop! Sunsong we don't have to fight---" Adderstorm started, but was cut off when the golden-brown tom hurtled himself toward him. The WindClan tom ran sharply to the left, leaping up on a ledge next to the pool of water.

"You nearly killed me! Not to mention you completely humiliated me in front of my clanmates! Beaten by a scrawny WindClan cat!" Sunsong spat, his amber eyes were full of rage. Adderstorm clung to the rocky ledge while the other tom spoke, his gaze darted around for other places to escape more attacks.

His chest heaved with fear, "I didn't mean to harm you that badly, I swear!" Adderstorm thought back on how Tanglestar had acted at the last Gathering. Was all of RiverClan out to kill them? Or was Sunsong just simply looking for revenge?

Sunsong hissed and let out a half-chuckle, "Just like a rabbit-chaser, won't own up to anything. You cower at any confrontation!" He jumped up to the ledge, and Adderstorm leapt up higher to a more narrow ledge. He wobbled a little but quickly regained his balance.

He could see the frustration building up behind the RiverClan tom's eyes, "If there's a traitor in WindClan, it *has* to be you. I felt what's really inside you, Adderstorm. And it's darker than the shadows." Sunsong declared, "So, I intend to put an end to it. Perhaps I'll save WindClan the trouble of finding a new territory to live in." The scarred tom lashed his tail wildly.

"Enough!" A commanding voice boomed in Adderstorm's ears. Sunsong took his fiery gaze off of the WindClan warrior to look to where the voice had come from. There stood Silveroak, her lips were drawn into a snarl, showing off her fangs. For a brief moment, Adderstorm swore up and down that she looked like a genuine warrior instead of a medicine cat.

"We are here to get in contact with StarClan, Adderstorm was merely accompanying me. Now, I suggest you go back to your territory before anything else happens to you. Or are you so fox-

hearted that you'd attack a medicine cat?" Silveroak's blue eyes shined with a challenging glint.

Sunsong glared at her, then back at Adderstorm, "Of course I'm not going to attack you, Silveroak, but I'll *gladly* tear *his* throat out." He purred, ignoring Silveroak, and pounced at Adderstorm.

Adderstorm had no time to react to Sunsong's attack. He felt the slashing of sharp claws against his side and the burning sensation of an open wound. A rumbling noise came from overhead, and before Adderstorm could yowl a warning, a pointy stone crumbled from its secure position.

The falling pointy stone brought Sunsong down with it, crashing against the stones below. Adderstorm shakily tried to balance himself on the ledge. He stared down at the crumbled stone and could clearly see Sunsong's unmoving body peeking from underneath it.

Silveroak carefully climbed to the ledge next to his and carried him down to safety by the scruff of his neck as if he were a kit. She set him down and examined his wound, "It's deep, you're going to have a lot of blood loss if I can't find anything to stop it.." Silveroak sighed, trotting quickly to a patch of ferns that were growing along with the mushrooms.

"These should work." Silveroak's voice seemingly started to fade into a quiet whisper for Adderstorm.

He's dead....*Sunsong is dead...*

Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted two shadows darting out of the cavern. Fog filled Adderstorm's vision and he was carried away into sleep.

Chapter 21

"Newtfire! Breezeshine! Fogpelt!" The ShadowClan members chanted the new warrior's names into the sky. Thistlejaw glanced over at Leopardwhisper, the black spotted tom was surprisingly purring with delight. Their father Aspenshade had a proud expression glinting in his amber eyes. This was probably a happy moment for his brother, he had just received Aspenshade's approval. However, for Thistlejaw it was another ugly reminder of how little he meant to his own father.

Newtfire would've been my apprentice if I hadn't freaked out when Mintstar originally chose me as his mentor. Thistlejaw's thoughts hissed at him. At the time, he didn't want to deal with the responsibility of it. *But one day I will, for now, I'm going to focus on myself.*

Thistlejaw rose to his paws, padding to the fresh-kill pile. ShadowClan was thriving despite it still being Leafbare, though there were no apprentices to train or queens in the nursery.

Well, one *of us has a pregnant mate.* Thistlejaw thought bitterly, glancing over at Leopardwhisper. He noticed his brother didn't leave camp as often as he had been. It made him wonder if Leopardwhisper was no longer visiting Pandora. *Somehow I think even if Pandora was a Clan cat he'd treat her just as he does now.*

He still couldn't believe how cruel his brother had acted towards the she-cat.

Ebonyfern sat next to him, her amber eyes glowing with pride and a hint of something else Thistlejaw couldn't quite place. "Well, I trained up my first apprentice and nothing too bad happened...other than her nearly smacking her head against trees when she chased after prey a few times." The gray tabby she-cat purred in amusement and nudged Thistlejaw's shoulder playfully.

"We haven't spent much time together since I've been a mentor, is

everything alright? Still having nightmares?"

The blue-gray tom prodded his paw against a mouse he scooped up from the fresh-kill pile, "Yes I am, though admittedly not as many as usual." Which was surprising considering all the stress he'd been under lately. First having a secret meet-up with Adderstorm, and then immediately finding out his brother had a kittypet for a mate *and* she was carrying his kits.

Ebonyfern's tail curled around her paws as she leaned down to take a bite from a squirrel, "Mm, I was wondering if you'd like to join me and Leopardwhisper on a border patrol after we eat?"

Thistlejaw blinked mid-chew on a morsel of the mouse, "Since when do you voluntarily go on patrols with my brother?" His tone was sharper than he anticipated, and he hoped that Ebonyfern wouldn't be too bothered by it.

"Since...we both trained our apprentices together? Are you two still having a kin spat? Grow up Thistlejaw, you're both warriors now." Ebonyfern lashed the tip of her tail and continued feasting on the squirrel.

Thistlejaw felt his paws itch with frustration, "How can we be having a kin spat if we don't ever talk to one another.." he muttered under his breath, mostly talking to himself than to the dark tabby she-cat.

Ebonyfern's amber eyes narrowed and her ears pinned back in disappointment, "Fine then, forget I ever asked." The she-cat stormed off to join Leopardwhisper at the camp entrance. The black tom peered back at Thistlejaw and shook his head as Ebonyfern spoke to him. The two warriors wandered out of camp, their flanks practically touching.

Thistlejaw felt his muscles tense with anger at the sight. *Why is he walking so close to her? Don't tell me Leopardwhisper has decided to get* another *mate!* Then again, it would explain the she-cat's sudden fascination towards his brother. Thistlejaw found himself feeling even more empathetic towards Pandora in that moment.

He stood up after finishing the rest of the mouse and walked to where Ottertail and Swiftflower were praising their three kits, now newly named warriors. A pang of jealousy filled Thistlejaw's chest as he watched the happy family.

I wonder, if our mom hadn't died, would Aspenshade had been a better father? Would we be as happy as they are right now? Thistlejaw thought. Though, according to Jaggedfang, who was the only current ShadowClan elder, Aspenshade had always been hard-headed and ambitious. Most of the Clan wasn't surprised when he became distant towards his kits.

But no cat knows how badly he really treated us. Only Leopardwhisper knows the real reason how I got the scar on my jaw.

"Ottertail?" Thistlejaw interrupted the brown and black striped tom, "I was wondering if I could lead a border or hunting patrol."

Ottertail's whiskers twitched in thought before he spoke, "Hm, sure. I don't see how it would hurt anything. We need a border patrol near WindClan territory." The big brown tom shrugged his shoulders and turned to Swiftflower again. Thistlejaw sighed with relief and bounded to where he could get the attention of the other warriors.

"Does anyone want to join me on a border patrol?" He called out, his tail flicking back and forth as he patiently waited for a response.

Berryfur paused from cleaning his pelt and he lifted his head, "Tawnyclaw and I need to collect more yarrow. So I think I'll tag along." The silver tabby tom stretched his legs and let out a soft yawn. Thistlejaw didn't object, but certainly wasn't looking forward to being in the grumpy medicine cat apprentice's company for an entire patrol.

"Count me and Newtfire in as well," Crowstrike said. Newtfire's golden eyes blinked in surprise, then he nodded, joining the dark gray tom's side quietly.

Thistlejaw's dread only worsened knowing that three of

Leopardwhisper's *'friends'* would be with him for the whole trip. It made him want to hurl himself into the warriors den and sleep off the rest of the day.

"Right then, let's head out." Thistlejaw murmured nervously and padded outside the camp towards the WindClan border. A constant sensation of uneasiness wouldn't leave him alone as the three cats behind him followed, not uttering a word.

Crowstrike suddenly darted in front of him. Before he knew it the dark gray tom pounced on a squirrel that was scurrying up a pine tree. The young warrior lifted his head in the air proudly, showing off his catch.

"Well done, Crowstrike! I can't believe you saw it from that far away!" Newtfire breathed in awe.

Crowstrike set the limp squirrel at his paws, "Whirlsplash always used to say my warrior name should be Croweyes, instead!"

Thistlejaw began to relax at Crowstrike and Newtfire's banter. It was nice to see two true friends in ShadowClan. Having bright energy made every cat a little bit happier. He forgot all about why he even thought these young toms as intimidating in the first place.

I suppose when you're around Leopardwhisper at all these days he automatically makes you seem cold and suspicious.

"Great catch, Crowstrike. Why don't you bury it under the ground and we'll pick it up on our way back?" Thistlejaw suggested, pointing his paw to a spot underneath the tree.

Crowstrike's green eyes shone in defiance, "No way! Newtfire and I haven't eaten all day! We'll eat and then continue on. Sound good you two?" The long-haired tom asked Newtfire and Berryfur, who both nodded in agreement.

Thistlejaw gaped in astonishment, "W-wait, what!? No. That's against the Warrior Code! We'll bring it back to camp for Jaggedfang instead." The blue-gray tom stepped forward to snatch the squirrel away from the young warrior. Crowstrike however,

wasn't going to allow him to do so. The green-eyed tom batted the squirrel to Newtfire instead.

"Hmph, really? Jaggedfang can hardly chew a piece of moss, he wouldn't fully appreciate this squirrel at all." Crowstrike argued, his white speckled tail lashing sharply.

Thistlejaw turned his attention to Berryfur. The medicine cat apprentice was just sitting there completely calm at the situation unfolding before him. "Berryfur, surely you of all cats know this isn't right for them to do!" He pleaded.

The thick-furred black striped tom simply shrugged, "It's not a big deal to me, Thistlejaw. We only have one elder and no queens or kits. I think it's okay for these two to have a meal before they go on patrol."

"Then they should've thought of that *before* they left camp!" Thistlejaw bristled, "It doesn't matter what we do or don't have at the moment, they're still breaking the Code. And as warriors they should know better."

Thistlejaw quickly ducked down and grabbed the squirrel with his mouth, "Forgeht rhis. O'm goingh bahck to cahmp." His words were muffled by the squirrel's fur, which made him sound less authoritative than he wanted to be.

"This is exactly why Leopardwhisper doesn't talk to you anymore," Crowstrike growled, but let Thistlejaw walk off without another argument. Thistlejaw quickly made his way back to camp and frustratedly tossed the squirrel onto the fresh-kill pile.

So much for relaxing today. I can't believe how disrespectful those two fluff-brains are! And furthermore, how could Berryfur condone that behavior? For a medicine cat apprentice to just brush off the Code like that...

It's not right. Something is definitely not right here...and I have a feeling it has something to do with StarClan's warning to me.

Chapter 22

Adderstorm wearily opened his eyes, instead of being in the darkness of the Mooncavern, he was instead laying comfortably in a feather-lined nest in Silveroak's den. Sunlight warmed his pelt, tempting to lull him back to sleep.

Unfortunately for him, the relaxation didn't last long before he could feel the stinging of several scratches and ache of bruises that littered his body. Adderstorm opened his mouth to mew with pain, but a gentle voice hushed to him like a mother to her kit.

"Ssh, I know it hurts. You took quite the tumble in the cavern.." Silveroak murmured. She sat in front of Adderstorm's nest, looking at the claw marks, "Lucky for you I was able to stop the bleeding before carrying you back to camp. They'll heal within this moon, as will the bruising."

The silver-and-white she-cat leaned over to her herb storage and rubbed a strong-scented poultice on his scratches. It seemed to make his wounds sting worse at first, but then the burning sensation wore off, leaving the deep cuts numb and almost painless.

A jolt of realization racked the brown tabby's body and he stared at Silveroak with wide eyes, "Sunsong, is he...is he really dead? Does his clan know? They're going to blame me if they find out we were fighting!---"

Silveroak put her paw against Adderstorm's muzzle, "Hush! Now is not the time to worry about such matters. You aren't the one who will deal with Sunsong's unfortunate demise." Her voice was commanding and sharp.

Adderstorm blinked in confusion and batted her paw away gently. *How is it not my business as to what happened to Sunsong? If I wasn't*

there he would still be alive! We're already on thin ice with RiverClan as it is, this could result in a bigger battle!

The medicine cat let out a thoughtful sigh, "I suppose I should go fetch his body, though.." Adderstorm had an immediate churn in his belly at those words. Ignoring the pain of his wounds and bruising, he managed to sit up and give the she-cat a shocked expression.

"You still haven't taken his body to RiverClan?"

Silveroak shook her head, "No, of course not. I had to make sure you weren't going to die as well. Surely you can understand that Adderstorm. Last night was a mess." Her eyes lowered to her paws and the silver-and-white patched she-cat went to her herb store to delicately put the herbs back into their shelves.

The brown tabby tom winced but kept himself in the sitting position, "So, did you find out anything from StarClan? Or did I ruin it for you?"

The medicine cat turned her gaze towards Adderstorm, her fur suddenly bristling nervously, "I found something out, yes, but I think now is the best time to tell you that you shouldn't be involved in this anymore, Adderstorm."

Rabbit-droppings! I tried telling her and Heronstar before this all happened. Why is she just now realizing this all was a mistake? Adderstorm thought.

"Any particular reason why? Other than the fact I unintentionally caused a death of a RiverClan warrior." Adderstorm rolled his eyes and irritably lashed his tail.

Silveroak stepped over and gently put a paw on his shoulder, "It's nothing personal. I just made the mistake of involving a young warrior in this. I know you received the warning, but perhaps last night was StarClan's way of telling me that I should just let you go to live your life." Her mew was quiet. Adderstorm simply nodded and walked out of the den.

It's not going to stop me from keeping an eye out for any suspicious cats,

though. He watched as Silveroak stepped into Heronstar's den. Adderstorm took a mouse from the fresh-kill pile. Frostpaw and Pebblepaw bounded towards him, clearly looking excited.

"Adderstorm! Adderstorm!" The two apprentices called out in unison. A purr rumbled in Adderstorm's throat at the sight of how happy the two were.

They had grown a considerable amount since Adderstorm had joined WindClan. Frostpaw had some of Jaytuft's features. He had longer fur and his paws were large and perfect for traction when running. However, Pebblepaw was more like her mother, Starlingwing. She was sleeker and much wirier than her brother.

Pebblepaw was the first to speak, her honey yellow eyes wide, "Is it true that you fought a RiverClan warrior in the Mooncavern?" The mottled brown she-cat was quickly nudged aside by her brother.

"Yeah! Is it true, Adderstorm? I bet you showed him that WindClan can easily beat their fish-breathed warriors!" The white tom was bouncing around Adderstorm, his light brown paws swiping at the ground.

These two certainly haven't lost much of their energy since they've become apprentices. Adderstorm beamed in amusement, "Yeah, it's true, but just remember that you don't need to hurt cats to win battles. Last night at the Mooncavern was a life and death situation." He explained.

"Aww, come on Adderstorm, you're no fun when you talk like that!" Pebblepaw huffed and sat down, lapping her tongue against her paw. Frostpaw paused his bouncing and landed next to his sister.

"Pebblepaw is right, we both know you're a fierce fighter! Probably the best in WindClan, it's no surprise that you killed that warrior!" Frostpaw said, his pale green eyes were full of pride.

Adderstorm felt as if a rock hit the bottom of his stomach. Is that what his clanmates thought of him? A fierce battle-hungry warrior? His white-tipped ears pinned down in shame and he lowered his head, "Frostpaw, Pebblepaw. It's not like that, I actually hate

harming warriors. Fighting may be a strong point of mine, but I only wish to use it when it's completely necessary."

The two apprentices blinked in shock then glanced at one another. Juniperlight strode over and cuffed Frostpaw and Pebblepaw over their heads gently, "You furballs have been taught the Warrior Code by me *and* Embermask. I would've hoped you two would remember it by now. After all, your warrior naming ceremony will be in a few moons!"

The black she-cat's yellow eyes settled on Adderstorm next, "I'm glad to see you're doing alright, Adderstorm. I'm sure Hollywish will also be relieved to know that you're already on your paws."

Adderstorm nodded thankfully and took a large bite from the mouse. *Hollywish...great StarClan! Since all this has been happening I've hardly spoken a word with her!* A wall of guilt crashed down in front of him. Hollywish had been his only friend for most of his apprenticeship. The realization he'd basically had abandoned her made him disgusted with himself. After he finished the mouse, he swiftly padded around the camp with a slight limp to find the silver dappled warrior.

Leafbare was slowly fading into Newleaf. The sunlight had become warmer in the past few days, causing the snow on the moor to melt away into the earth. Adderstorm's green gaze looked out upon the vast hills and rocky patches. He yearned to run as fast as he could across the territory without getting his paws freezing cold and wet with mud.

It has to wait until I've healed. Adderstorm sighed to himself and continued on his search for Hollywish in camp. He poked his head into the nursery, the scent of it was sweet and comforting. Badgerfur laid in her nest chewing on a morsel of a rabbit. By the looks of her incredibly swollen belly, Adderstorm figured the black-and-white she-cat might give birth to her kits that night or the next.

Luckily, sitting near the pregnant she-cat was Hollywish. The dappled she-cat chatted and giggled with Badgerfur for a moment more before she noticed Adderstorm at the den entrance. "Oh,

Adderstorm, you're okay. Thank StarClan!" She meowed with relief and leapt over to bury her muzzle against his shoulder.

"I can't believe Sunsong turned that hateful towards you. He always seemed like a noble cat." Hollywish stepped back from him, shaking her head in disbelief. Adderstorm awkwardly shifted his paws. Had Silveroak announced what happened that quickly to the clan?

Badgerfur stretched her legs and let out a purr, "Heronstar certainly named you appropriately, Adderstorm. A storm of claws and teeth more like." Her pale amber eyes shined with amusement and Hollywish chuckled in response. Only Adderstorm felt more ashamed for the reputation he was getting among WindClan. He wasn't a muscular brute of a cat, he was only trying to *protect* something or someone each time he fought.

"We're lucky to have you in our clan you know," Hollywish said, "Even Robinbriar admitted today that he would never want to get into a tussle with you!" The dappled silver she-cat lifted a paw to her muzzle to keep her giggling contained.

Adderstorm relaxed a little, settling next to Hollywish and Badgerfur. The aching in his wounds subsided considerably, and he made a note to himself that he should probably go rest in the warrior's den after this conversation.

"How are you two doing by the way?" He asked. In all the time he'd spent absent from Hollywish's presence he'd almost forgotten that she and Robinbriar had become close to being mates.

The blue-eyed warrior's ears perked up, "We're doing fine. We've decided to wait a bit before we have kits. That's part of the reason I came into the nursery, I hoped Badgerfur might be able to give some advice." Hollywish tucked her tail around her legs as she spoke.

"Oh, that's great to hear!" Adderstorm felt awkward again, the idea of having kits was something that he couldn't relate to. He liked spending time with Frostpaw and Pebblepaw of course, but he never really liked the thought of having to deal with his own kits. Most toms didn't even spend lots of time with their kits in the early

stages of their lives.

I don't know how I could ignore my kits at all. I'd want to be just as involved as their mother. Adderstorm thought, the tip of his tail flicking as he pondered the fact that one day he might have to face fatherhood. It wasn't an obligation of course, but most warriors want to have kits to keep the clan going for future generations.

Now that Hollywish is Robinbriar's mate, I don't know which she-cat I would even choose. Or which she-cat would even consider being with me. A strange thought started tugging at Adderstorm's mind, making him think back to his secret meeting with Thistlejaw. He subtly shook his head to divert his mind back to Hollywish.

The she-cat's dark blue eyes blinked worriedly, "Are you alright, Adderstorm? Maybe you should go rest. Those scratches still look pretty fresh."

"Actually, I think I'm just going to go out of camp for a stroll." He said, standing up and starting to pad out of the nursery, "I'll talk with you later, Hollywish!" And with his farewell, he strode out of camp, ignoring the limp Sunsong had so graciously bestowed him with.

A clump of melted snow crashed to the forest floor with a heavy thump, rustling the ferns at the base of the tree. Thistlejaw breathed in the cool, damp air as he traveled along the ShadowClan border. The first signs of Newleaf were showing as he noticed a tiny patch of bright green sprouts at the edge of the river bank.

The ShadowClan deputy, Ottertail led the small border patrol quietly. His big brown and black striped head turned to Thistlejaw, "I spoke to Mintstar about your concerns with Crowstrike and Newtfire."

Thistlejaw stopped walking and questioningly tilted his chin up, "And what did she say?" He surprisingly didn't feel any worry that the clan leader might not believe him. Maybe it had to do with Ottertail being a kind and understanding cat to talk to. Even if

Mintstar didn't do anything about it, at least Ottertail would be gentle at breaking the news.

"She said that she would speak to them after they got back from a hunting patrol. The only way to tell if they're eating prey before anyone else is to smell their breath after they return from hunting." Ottertail murmured. His amber eyes trailed off to look in the distance.

Thistlejaw's fur ruffled and he rested his tail on the deputy's back in sympathy, "I'm sorry that I had to make an accusation against your son, but just because he's a new warrior doesn't mean he shouldn't be following the Code."

The brown tabby tom shook his head, "No, you were right to do so, Thistlejaw. Don't apologize for it. If it is true, I just can't understand why he'd do such a thing."

"Step away from the border, rabbit-chaser!" A ShadowClan she-cat's voice snarled loudly ahead of Thistlejaw and Ottertail. The deputy let out an irritated sigh and bounded away with the blue-gray tom darting after him.

Thistlejaw's yellow eyes widened at when he saw who Dovedapple was busy hissing at. *Adderstorm! You mouse-brain, do I need to save your tail again?* The brown-and-white tabby tom looked recently wounded and he looked exhausted. His claws flexed into the mud angrily. *Who hurt you?*

"Dovedapple. Enough. He's in his own territory for StarClan's sake, you don't have to attack him!" He growled and stepped in front of the brown and silver she-cat. Dovedapple's jaw dropped and she glared at Thistlejaw with blue-green slits of annoyance.

"I *didn't* attack him. The scrawny thing was already injured when he nearly stepped over our border! Perhaps you should have more trust in your clanmate rather than trying to defend a WindClan warrior." Dovedapple's tail lashed.

Ottertail nudged the she-cat to back up and he looked from her to Thistlejaw, "*Both* of you need to quit it. Dovedapple, stopping the

patrol for *one* WindClan warrior who's on his side of the border is ridiculous. And Thistlejaw, you let me decide whether or not my warriors deserve to be scolded."

Thistlejaw lowered his head in embarrassment. Getting in trouble with the deputy in front of Adderstorm was a lot more humiliating than he thought it would be. A part of him wanted to look strong and fearless when he was with the WindClan tom. Now he just looked like he was disobedient and reckless.

"Yes, Ottertail. I'm sorry." He said quietly. The big brown tom nodded and gestured with his tail for Dovedapple and Thistlejaw to continue to follow him along the border. When the deputy was out of sight, Thistlejaw turned to Adderstorm.

The brown tabby quickly broke the silence, "I'm sorry. It was my fault that you got in trouble, I shouldn't be here, but I wanted to see you." Thistlejaw was still agitated from the whole ordeal, but the softness and desperation in Adderstorm's green eyes made him forget about it for a brief moment.

"Just be lucky Ottertail and I were here, anyone else in the clan would've likely torn your pelt off" he muttered. "What happened to you?" Thistlejaw had a better view of Adderstorm's wounds. Claw marks with freshly dried blood were more prominent on the WindClan warrior's left side.

"Sunsong ambushed me and Silveroak at the Mooncavern. H-he's dead now.." Adderstorm's voice was shaky as if he were afraid Thistlejaw would strike him down at hearing the news. Though that couldn't have been further from the truth. The blue-gray warrior immediately stepped over the border and buried his muzzle against Adderstorm's chest.

"Great StarClan, Adderstorm. Do I have to be by your side every moment of the day to make sure you don't die?" He laughed half-heartedly. *He could have died last night and I wouldn't have known about it until the next Gathering. I could have lost my best friend.* Thistlejaw's thoughts raced. Ebonyfern hadn't spoken to him since their argument about Leopardwhisper. He dreaded that he was going to lose her as well.

Adderstorm comfortingly swiped his tongue over Thistlejaw's ear, "I think the main problem is that I need to watch what I say and do" he said. "I'm glad I got to see you today, Thistlejaw, but you should get back to your patrol before they get suspicious."

"Right." The ShadowClan warrior stepped back into his territory, "You make sure to rest up! You'll need your strength to race me up the oak tree again next time we meet" Thistlejaw challenged cheerfully.

"Of course, wouldn't want to miss that!" the brown-and-white tabby tom mrowed out before Thistlejaw bounded away to join Ottertail and Dovedapple through the bushes.

Chapter 23

Three moons had passed since the tragic incident with Sunsong in the Mooncavern had occurred. Silveroak hadn't mentioned Adderstorm was present at the time of his death to Tanglestar. Only that she saw him fall off a cliff and get crushed underneath rocks. The information had made him uneasy at every single Gathering. Adderstorm didn't want to lie to RiverClan about such an important matter, but Silveroak had explained it was for the best. If Tanglestar and her clan knew the truth, there would surely be a fierce battle against WindClan.

The prophecy had yet to pass, and in return, they've yet to receive answers. He'd noticed that Silveroak spent more time speaking with Palespeck and Heronstar. Concern always filled their quiet mews. Silveroak also started taking longer trips to collect herbs by herself. He didn't blame her, taking walks around the territory was probably the only thing to keep her mind focused on something else.

But Adderstorm wondered if perhaps StarClan was wrong about there being a traitor in WindClan. Every cat seemed to be living in peace since Newleaf had come around. Badgerfur finally had given birth to four healthy, energetic kits. Three she-kits and one tom; Willowkit, Doekit, Blossomkit, and Magpiekit.

In addition to four new kits being born, Frostpaw and Pebblepaw had received their warrior names; Frostleap and Pebblepelt. Adderstorm could remember the proud expressions on Jaytuft and Starlingwing's faces at the naming ceremony. He had to admit, he was proud of them as well.

Drops of morning dew dripped from the blades of grass, dampening Adderstorm's paws. Hollywish's silver dappled fur raced past him in a blur, snapping him out of his thoughts.

She must've spotted a rabbit!

Behind her, another flash of dark brown and ginger colored fur of Robinbriar followed. This was the first time in moons that all three of them had gone on a hunting patrol together. Robinbriar usually took nightly shifts guarding the camp entrance, while Hollywish and Adderstorm mostly had morning patrols.

"Try to keep up, Adderstorm!" Robinbriar called back to him with a laugh. Adderstorm shook his head and flicked his tail in amusement. Since Robinbriar had taken Hollywish as his mate, his harsh teasing toward Adderstorm started to slowly fade. Though, it was never completely gone. The brown and ginger tom would still poke fun if he had the chance.

Adderstorm leapt after the other two warriors. His powerful hind legs tearing up a soft patch of ground as he ran across the moor, dodging rock piles in the process. Hollywish was closing in on the rabbit, her dark blue eyes focused intensely.

"Robinbriar, it's heading for its burrow. Try to cut it off!" the she-cat instructed. Robinbriar wasted no time bounding ahead of his mate, trying his best to get in front of the rabbit. The small, brown creature made a sharp left turn, away from the burrow. Adderstorm felt the burning of cold air in his lungs. His eyes narrowed in on the rabbit that had stupidly turned and was heading in his direction.

It won't stay like that for long, I need to take my chance!
Adderstorm slowed his pursuit enough to put all the weight on his hind legs, leaping forward with his claws unsheathed. His claws hooked into the rabbit's flesh and before he knew it he had tumbled into the creek along with it.

Robinbriar padded up to the edge of the bank and didn't bother hiding his laughter. Hollywish looked more concerned, but her eyes were glimmering with contained amusement.

"You always were clumsy, but I didn't know you were using it as a new hunting technique!" Robinbriar mewed, his whiskers trembling from the rumble of chuckling.

Adderstorm picked up the drenched rabbit in his jaws and hauled it

out of the creek, shaking off the water in his fur. A voice from the opposite side of the creek made Adderstorm and the others jump in surprise.

"A fine catch, indeed. I must say, you WindClan cats certainly *do* impress me with your speed and stamina---though I suppose *you* missed that part of your warrior training." When Adderstorm turned his head he was shocked to see Leopardwhisper lounging on a boulder.

"Do you normally watch WindClan's hunting patrols?" Adderstorm muttered, setting the rabbit down at his paws. Thistlejaw had said that he was growing suspicious of his brother at the last Gathering, but he didn't say why he was.

I can't be too trustworthy to any cat. Especially those who would easily shred my pelt off if they found out I was friends with Thistlejaw. Adderstorm thought and watched as the black spotted tom stretched his legs before hopping off of the boulder.

"No, of course, I don't. I have better things to with my time than watch scrawny rabbit-chasers all day." Leopardwhisper chuckled, his one amber and one yellow eye shining with a prideful glint.

Robinbriar's fur ruffled in irritation and he stepped closer to the bank, "Stop being creepy then and leave us alone, then!" The tom hissed, Hollywish gently nudged him away from the bank's edge and murmured calmly into his ear.

The ShadowClan warrior's expression seemed to brighten even more to Robinbriar's challenging tone, "My, my...so paranoid that you'll be attacked. You WindClan cats are much like the very prey you hunt, you know. All skittish and afraid." Leopardwhisper purred, his voice was smooth and taunting.

Adderstorm shuddered. Leopardwhisper wasn't like Thistlejaw at all. While Thistlejaw's presence was warm and comforting, Leopardwhisper's was always cold and threatening. Something about the dark ShadowClan tom always made him think he was being manipulated by every word he spoke.

"Good thing we know how to fight back, unlike rabbits." Adderstorm narrowed his pale green eyes at the other tom. Leopardwhisper merely purred again, his eyes quietly studying the brown tabby.

"Oh yes, you're the fierce young warrior of the rabbit-chasers. How could I forget?" Leopardwhisper looked down at his unsheathed claws then began to sharpen them on the boulder. "If you weren't stuck in WindClan you would be capable of great things, Adderstorm.."

To Adderstorm's surprise, Hollywish was the one to answer the ShadowClan warrior.

"Alright flea-pelt, that'll be enough that we hear out of you for today. Adderstorm, Robinbriar, let's go back to camp." She sneered and turned away from the creek, picking up the soaked rabbit that Adderstorm had left near his paws. The brown tabby took one last glance back at Leopardwhisper, who was staring at them as they headed off. His words still echoing in his mind.

When he and the two other warriors returned from their hunt, Robinbriar had mentioned their encounter with Leopardwhisper to Palespeck. The deputy thanked him and told him that she would make sure to send out a border patrol to refresh the scent markers near ShadowClan's territory.

"Adderstorm, would you accompany me to check how well the herbs are growing?" Silveroak's mew sounded behind him as he was drying his damp fur in the warmth of the Newleaf sun. Adderstorm nodded silently and hopped up, joining the silver-and-white she-cat's side.

Silveroak sniffed the air once they got a few fox-lengths from the camp entrance and she padded to a patch of green with bunches of white flowers sprouting on the ends. "Looks like the yarrow will be plentiful this season...speaking of, can you believe it was nearly a *season* ago that you joined WindClan, Adderstorm?" The medicine cat purred.

"Not at all actually, seems like just yesterday." Adderstorm

murmured, thinking back on the days when his clanmates were wary of every word he spoke and every step he took. *I'm glad that all that has seemed to come and gone. Unless they secretly still are, in that case, I don't know what I'd do.*

The medicine cat nodded in agreement before continuing her trip through the long blades of grass. The sound of the bubbling creek was getting louder in his ears. The scent of a RiverClan patrol drifted through the air. Luckily they'd avoided a battle with RiverClan in Leafbare, for now. *There's no telling what will set* Tanglestar *off next. Her warriors are usually not tense unless she starts accusations.* Adderstorm thought. He couldn't imagine being in a clan with a leader so determined to start a fight.

Apparently, Silveroak had smelled the patrol as well, her tail bristled and she glanced down at her paws, "Look, Adderstorm. I see no possible outcome to our situation with RiverClan that ends with peace. I've spoken to Lilywhisker and Sheepbounce, they both say Tanglestar isn't happy with the amount of territory they currently have. They're afraid that she'll lead warriors into an unnecessary battle with us."

Adderstorm's heart started racing with fear and anger, "But we don't have any territory they'd want, that's ridiculous." His tail lashed irritably and he glared over in the direction of RiverClan's territory. Silveroak's ice blue eyes set on Adderstorm, looking slightly surprised.

"You're right, but if she wanted to, Tanglestar would have a good chance of running us off a piece of territory." She meowed softly, hopping onto a fallen tree to look out over the moor. Her silver and white fur ruffled in the breeze.

"Hollywish mentioned that you ran into a ShadowClan warrior near the border, Leopardwhisper, correct?"

Adderstorm's ears pricked up when Silveroak mentioned the tom. *Why is she bringing him up all the sudden?* He questioned himself, but simply nodded in response to the medicine cat. Silveroak joined Adderstorm back on the ground and she faced him.

"Leopardwhisper is hardly a threat to us, in fact, I think certain ShadowClan cats would be able to ally with us if battles broke out amongst WindClan and RiverClan, wouldn't you agree, Adderstorm?" She asked quietly. Her icy blue eyes not holding any sign of concern that he would protest.

He shifted his paws uncomfortably as he tried to calm himself down. *No, Silveroak couldn't know about me and Thistlejaw, that's impossible. I made sure that no cat follows me when I meet up with him. And at Gatherings, we try to barely speak to one another!* His mind was reaching for excuses that he could make to contradict the she-cat's suspicions.

"Allies are a good thing to have. If the Clans simply worked together, there wouldn't be the concern of fighting with each other, Adderstorm. One big Clan to help one another and live in peace." Silveroak continued.

Adderstorm finally composed himself enough to answer her, "I believe that *certain* cats from another Clan would be willing to help out in a crisis, but at the end of the day, we're still all enemies. I don't think having one single clan is a realistic goal." He gulped nervously. Silveroak's blue eyes narrowed into slits and she paced around him in thought.

"Well, of course not every cat would want to live in peace. But that would make them selfish, wouldn't it? And in a *true* clan, those who live to please only themselves would be kicked out!" Silveroak spat back then quickly her icy glare softened and she let out a long, defeated sigh.

"I'm sorry, Adderstorm. I didn't mean to snap at you."

The brown tabby tom's pale green eyes blinked in shock and he slowly nodded, "It's okay, Silveroak. Oh, hey! Have any of Badgerfur's kits shown interest in being a medicine cat yet?" Adderstorm changed the subject, hoping that he didn't have to endure another conversation of ShadowClan and Silveroak snapping at him again.

The silver-and-white spotted she-cat weaved around a pile of rocks

until she reached an abundance of tansy. She took a brief pause to examine it before she responded, "Not yet. I fear that I will never have an apprentice at this point." Her paw prodded gently at the yellow flowers.

"We can't collect anything yet, it still needs time to grow, but when it does we'll have a good stock of it. Might even let Berryfur or Tigerfrost and Ashbreeze take some for their store as well." Silveroak meowed, pondering aloud.

"Not Lilywhisker and Sheepbounce?" Adderstorm questioned. *That's a very specific set of names. And why would she not mention Tawnyclaw as well?*

Silveroak flicked her tail and glanced over at the creek, "They've already told me that they have plenty of herbs at the moment. ThunderClan and ShadowClan are running a bit low. It doesn't hurt to *help* one another once in a while."

Adderstorm continued following the medicine cat until they checked every patch of herbs they could. Suddenly, a yowl of alarm rose from a cat darting across the moor until they reached Adderstorm and Silveroak. On closer inspection, the cat turned out to be Frostleap. His chest heaving from running.

"Silveroak! Come back to camp quickly, Jaytuft got bitten by a rattlesnake!" Frostleap's gaze was full of worry and desperation.

Silveroak's eyes widened and she immediately ran back to camp. Adderstorm and Frostleap following close behind. Adderstorm's heart raced along with his legs. Dread filled his stomach and he suddenly felt like wretching into the grass. Venom from a rattlesnake bite would surely kill his former mentor, it would only be a matter of time.

Am I really about to lose the cat who treated me like I was his second son? No, StarClan don't *take him from us yet, he still has such a long life to live!* Adderstorm pleaded with the ancestors above.

When they reached the camp the diluted tortoiseshell tom was laying stiffly near the medicine cat den, his legs were visibly

swollen and a nasty bite mark was on his right front leg. Silveroak rushed to his side and checked his breathing and listened for his heartbeat before she darted into her den.

"Is he going to be alright?!" Starlingwing yowled to Silveroak, who came out of the medicine den with a mouthful of yarrow and tormentil.

"I can't say whether he will be or not, I'm not sure if the poison has reached his heart yet. I'm going to try to extract it the best I can." Silveroak quickly explained before chewing up each herb and rubbing it onto the bite.

Adderstorm stood by and watched with Frostleap and his sister Pebblepelt. Both of the young cats were shaking with fear and Frostleap was on the verge of tears. His mind raced to try to find out the last time he had properly talked with Jaytuft. Sadness welled up in his throat when he realized that he *hadn't* been speaking to his former mentor hardly at all since he became a warrior.

I owe him so much. Why have I been so careless as to toss away the first cat that ever accepted me?

Jaytuft's body gave one final lurch and shudder before he stilled completely, his foggy gaze stared at the sky above him. Adderstorm felt as if the entire clan stopped moving and breathing at that moment as well. The silence was eventually followed by a loud wail from Starlingwing. The brown she-cat tossed herself against Jaytuft's unmoving body and cried out against his fur.

Frostleap and Pebblepelt joined their mother in mourning while Silveroak took a step back from them. Adderstorm hadn't felt much grief since his mother had died when he was hardly apprentice age, but back then he really didn't grasp the meaning of death as well as he did now.

All he could manage to do was sink his claws into the ground and weep, his head hanging low.

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Jaytuft...

Allegiances Update #3

Windclan:

Leader: Heronstar - A small light gray tom with blue eyes

Deputy: Palespeck - A golden brown she-cat with darker spots and yellow eyes.

Medicine Cat: Silveroak- A small silver she-cat with white patches and ice blue eyes.

Warriors:

Adderstorm- Slender dusty brown tom with rusty brown stripes and white paws/markings with green eyes.

Hollywish- A broad-shouldered silver she-cat with dappled fur and dark blue eyes.

Robinbriar -A long-haired dark brown tom with ginger patches and blue-purple eyes.

Starlingwing- A brown yellow-eyed she-cat with white speckles on her back.

Redstripe- Reddish brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Fawnpool- A brown she-cat with white paws and amber eyes

Embermask- A white tom with ginger face markings, hazel eyes

Juniperlight- A black she-cat with a white tipped tail and yellow eyes

Pebblepelt- A mottled brown she-cat with honey colored eyes

Frostleap- A white tom with two light brown front paws and pale green eyes

Queens:

Badgerfur- Black and white she-cat with pale amber eyes ***Kits:*** **Willowkit-** A ginger she-kit with white paws and amber eyes, **Magpiekit-** A black tom with green eyes and white markings on his shoulders like magpie wings, **Blossomkit-** A brown she-kit with black stripes and hazel eyes, **Doekit-** A pale ginger she-kit with a black and white tail and amber eyes

(Mate/Father is Embermask)

Elders:

Oatstep- A golden tabby tom with hazel eyes

Shadowclan:

Leader: Mintstar- A thick-furred dark gray she-cat, pale green eyes

Deputy: Ottertail- A big brown and black striped tom with black paws, amber eyes

Medicine cat: Tawnyclaw- A dark ginger she-cat with black stripes, yellow-green eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Berryfur- A thick-furred silver and black striped tom, pale green eyes.

Warriors:

Aspenshade- A dark blue-gray tom with amber eyes and a scarred pelt.

Thistlejaw- A broad-shouldered blue-gray tom with yellow eyes.

Leopardwhisper- A black tom with darker spots with one amber eye and one yellow eye.

Crowstrike- A long furred dark gray tom with white markings and green eyes

Dovedapple- A pale brown and silver tabby she-cat, with blue-green eyes.

Whirlsplash- A big pale gray spotted tabby she-cat with black patches, with blue eyes.

Marshfoot- A long furred brown tom with black paws and pale yellow eyes

Ebonyfern- A dark gray tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Swiftflower- A sleek pale gray and black dappled she-cat with hazel eyes.

Breezeshine- a small gray dappled she-cat with hazel eyes

Newtfire- a dark brown tom with black tipped ears and a light brown muzzle, golden eyes

Fogpelt- a gray tabby tom with amber eyes

Elders:

Jaggedfang- A thin tawny tom with a scarred face and a fang resting over his lower lip.

Thunderclan:

Leader: Oakstar- A pale brown tom with white ears and a white muzzle, light blue eyes.

Deputy: Sparrowstrike- A dark brown and white she-cat with

dappled fur, green eyes.

Medicine cat: Tigerfrost- A long furred blue-gray tabby tom with white markings, black ears and amber eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Ashbreeze A gray tabby tom with only three legs and amber eyes

Warriors:

Hollowpelt- A red-brown and black she-cat with black patches and green eyes

Emeraldtalon- A brown spotted tabby tom with black ears, brilliant green eyes

Minnowthroat- A long furred pale gray tabby tom with a white patch on his throat and yellow eyes

Brackendusk- A dark brown she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Creektail- A sleek white tabby tom with hazel eyes

Plumfur- A dark gray she-cat with lighter spots and blue eyes

Nightleaf- A gray she-cat with black paws and amber eyes

Mothcloud- A slim brown she-cat with a long black tail and blue eyes

Lizardleap- A brown tom with lighter paws and a thin tail with green eyes

Nettletooth- A brown and cream colored she-cat with yellow eyes

Riverclan:

Leader: Tanglestar- A dark ginger spotted she-cat,amber eyes.

Deputy: Blizzardleaf- A big white tom with silver paws and amber eyes

Medicine cat: Lilywhisker- A light brown she-cat with a white underbelly, yellow eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Sheepbounce- A long furred white she-cat with yellow eyes

Warriors:

Spiderstripe- A cream colored she-cat with black stripes and amber eyes

Timbercloud- A dark gray tom with hazel eyes

Cherrypool- A ginger she-cat with white markings and blue eyes

Waspflight- A golden tabby tom with a black tipped tail and amber eyes

Mossypelt- A long-haired light brown she-cat with green eyes

Stonebranch- A silver tabby tom with golden eyes

Blackear- A sleek dark ginger tom with black ears

Apprentices:

Finchpaw- A gray-brown dappled she-cat with pale green eyes *(Mentor is Blizzardleaf)*

Cats Outside the Clans:

Pandora- A calico she-cat with ice blue eyes and a collar.

Chapter 24

"Have you eaten anything, Adderstorm? You look like you're about ready to fall over." Thistlejaw mewed with concern as the brown tabby tom sat next to him at the base of the oak tree. The WindClan warrior's green gaze was devoid of the usual spark they had.

Eventually, he replied in a hushed voice, "No, I haven't. My former mentor, Jaytuft died a few sunrises ago. Haven't had an appetite since.." Adderstorm drew his tail around his front paws. The sound of crickets followed the confession, chirping in the tall grass of the moor.

Thistlejaw's chest swelled with empathy. He never realized how heartbreaking it was to see his friend in such emotional pain. "I'm sorry, Adderstorm...I know that must be difficult, but it doesn't mean you're allowed to starve yourself. I'm sure Jaytuft would've cuffed you on the ear for making such a decision!"

Adderstorm shrugged his shoulders and leaned into Thistlejaw. Their pelts pressing against one another and emitting a familiar, comforting warmth.

"He was the first cat to believe in me. You know, I was a rogue kit before I joined WindClan. Long story short, my mother was insane and got exiled after my father took another mate after he got her pregnant." Adderstorm admitted, his ears drawing back in shame. Thistlejaw's eyes widened in surprise.

A rogue? I would have never guessed!

Thistlejaw sighed and nuzzled his friend's cheek softly, "I don't care about where you came from. It doesn't matter where you're born. If you serve your Clan and take care of your clanmates, to me that makes you a clan cat, through and through."

The WindClan tom relaxed more. Clearly, he thought that Thistlejaw was going to ridicule him. *How could I?* Thistlejaw

thought. *He's the best thing to ever happen to me, I wouldn't ruin that by being narrowminded.*

The morning sun was starting to shine light upon the golden moor. Adderstorm licked Thistlejaw's shoulder before he started climbing down the oak tree with him. They didn't usually choose early mornings to meet up, but it certainly was a beautiful sight to share with his friend. No clouds rolled across the sky, it was only a shade of vast blue and grays.

As Thistlejaw leapt to the ground next to Adderstorm he gave him a soft gaze, "I promise you, things will get better."

The brown tabby nodded and a glint of happiness finally shone in his eyes, "You're right, Thistlejaw. It'll just take a little while to come to terms with his death. I'll be fine." He purred and entwined their tails together.

"I'll see you tomorrow night?" Adderstorm asked hopefully.

"Of course you will," Thistlejaw assured him, padding into ShadowClan territory. He rolled around against the pine needles and grass to get rid of Adderstorm's scent from his pelt before walking back to camp.

Adderstorm pounced on a mouse, killing it with a swift bite. He knew if he didn't bring back prey, cats would grow suspicious of him going out of camp before dawn. Though, one measly mouse wouldn't do much for the clan.

A reddish-brown head of a cat poked from the grass. Adderstorm immediately recognized it as Redstripe's. The senior warrior padded over to him with a pleased look in his yellow eyes, "Good to see you busy hunting so early, Adderstorm."

He flicked his tail awkwardly, the mouse laying in front of his paws. *Why is Redstripe so friendly all of the sudden?* Adderstorm questioned uneasily.

"Do you want to join me? I know of a lark nest not too far from

here." Redstripe meowed. His lighthearted tone only making Adderstorm's uneasiness worsen. Adderstorm politely declined, picking up the mouse in his jaws.

"Sorry, I'm sure Badgerfur's kits want something warm in their bellies. Can't keep them waiting," he explained and continued to camp. To his relief, he spotted Badgerfur out of the nursery with her four kits. Embermask was sharing tongues with her while the kits were busy pretending to hunt rabbits.

He strolled over to them and dropped the mouse, "There you are, how about you hunt this?". The kits swarmed around the mouse and Doekit was the first to pounce on it. The pale ginger she-kit was already doing a fairly good hunting crouch.

"Be sure to eat it soon. We wouldn't want to disrespect our prey." He started to explain just as a brown tabby she-kit; Blossomkit batted it in the air with her paw. The other two kits stared at their siblings, eventually joining in when Doekit made the mouse land near their parents. Badgerfur and Embermask chuckled at the sight.

"You do so well with kits, Adderstorm. What a lucky she-cat your mate will be in the future." The black-and-white queen purred, nuzzling the white tom next to her. Embermask was a good father too, he often hung around the nursery when he wasn't patrolling.

So was Jaytuft. His thoughts suggested, making the pain in his heart flare up once again. It hurt knowing that he was no longer going to be around anymore. *"I promise you, things will get better"* It was Thistlejaw's voice echoing in his head, now. He repeated the words a few more times before letting out a sigh.

Badgerfur was right, he wanted to have a family, but not with a she-cat. He'd only ever had feelings for Hollywish, but that was a long time ago and he was younger. Ever since he met Thistlejaw, he wondered if it was possible to love a tom as much as a she-cat would. At this point, he felt as if they were more than friends.

The Clans would look down upon us. Especially since we're from different clans. How would it ever work out?

It wouldn't. Not unless they were to leave their clans altogether. Adderstorm couldn't ask him to do that for him, he didn't even know if Thistlejaw felt the same way for StarClan's sake! Besides, he liked it in WindClan, being a kittypet or rogue again would be difficult to stomach after all the work he did to prove he was clan-worthy.

Heronstar appeared out of the corner of his eye, distracting him from his thoughts. The small pale gray tom seemed to be searching around the camp.

"Is something wrong, Heronstar?" He asked, concern in his mew.

The WindClan leader turned to Adderstorm. For the first time, the tom looked as if he was about to lose his composure. Worry clouded his blue gaze. Something was *definitely* wrong.

"I was wondering if you've seen Palespeck? Pebblepelt told me that you went out on a before-dawn hunt and I can't seem to find any cat who saw her go anywhere." Heronstar's tail swayed back and forth nervously.

Adderstorm shook his head, "No, I haven't seen Palespeck since yesterday---"

His explanation was cut off by a yowl of alarm, *"Heronstar! Heronstar! I found Palespeck, oh great StarClan, she's dead! RiverClan killed her!"*

It was Redstripe. The older tom's chest heaved from running and his yellow eyes were full of grief. Adderstorm's fur bristled, how many more cats were going to die in his clan?

Heronstar hissed in shock, "*What?!* Are you sure it was RiverClan, Redstripe?"

Redstripe's whiskers trembled, "Of course I'm sure! Her body is near the RiverClan border with their scent all over her. Not to mention she looks like she was attacked by another cat!" The tom's voice shook with anger. Heronstar gently rested his tail against Redstripe's shoulder.

"Go lay down in Silveroak's den, Redstripe. I'm going with a patrol to retrieve her body." Heronstar's tone calmed considerably as he spoke to the reddish-brown tom. Adderstorm could tell that the leader was trying not to alarm anyone or lose his temper. *He just lost his deputy, who will he even pick as a replacement? Palespeck was a perfect balance to Heronstar for their ways of authority.*

The light gray tom padded towards the camp entrance and called back to the group of warriors loudly, "Fawnpool, Embermask, and Adderstorm, come with me." The WindClan leader demanded, and all three cats complied without a word, following Heronstar to the RiverClan border.

Palespeck's limp body was stretched across the edge of the riverbank. A deep, red gash stretched across her throat and her claws were still unsheathed from being in the middle of a fight before her death. The stench of RiverClan was all over her mud-covered golden fur.

The WindClan leader lowered his head, tears welling in his eyes. Adderstorm felt his own eyes mist up as well, losing another clanmate only days after Jaytuft's death was heartbreaking. *Not only a clanmate, a future leader.*

"StarClan, what have we done to deserve this?" Fawnpool meowed quietly, her white paws stained pink when she touched another wound of Palespeck's on her back. Adderstorm felt queasy, the former deputy hadn't been dead for long. Had to be less than a sunrise since her death.

Heronstar's light gray pelt whipped around swiftly when a RiverClan border patrol padded up on the opposite side of the river. Fur bristled and cats hissed at the sight of the WindClan warriors. A silver tabby tom growled in irritation, "What are you WindClan cats doing this time? Plan on invading our territory by getting carried by the rapids?"

"Stonebranch, calm yourself." The RiverClan deputy, Blizzardleaf warned the other tom. The large deputy's white fur bristled as well when he noticed Palespeck's corpse, "What's happened here, Heronstar?"

Adderstorm uneasily stood next to Embermask as Heronstar lifted his gaze to meet Blizzardleaf's. Their leader looked much less calm than normal, and he had a feeling that this conversation wouldn't end in resolution.

"One of your warriors has murdered my deputy!" The pale gray tom spat, his blue eyes wild with rage, "Ever since Tanglestar has taken over as leader, RiverClan has been acting like we're no better than rogues. But I never thought that you would stoop this low!"

Blizzardleaf's amber eyes widened, "You dare accuse us of murdering a clan deputy?"

"Your scent is all over her fur!" Fawnpool yowled, "Who else could have killed her if not one of your warriors?"

Adderstorm tensed up more. *Please, StarClan I don't want to fight anyone, not today.*

"You're delusional!" Stonebranch hissed and turned to a grayish brown dappled she-cat next to him. She shook her head and murmured, "Perhaps you should just go sit vigil your deputy and leave us be."

Blizzardleaf silenced the two others with his tail, "Or maybe they should speak with Tanglestar if they have an accusation to make."

Heronstar's legs shook and he gritted his teeth, "*You're* the delusional cats if you truly think that destroying us is what Smokestar wanted. She'd be ashamed of her own clan if she were still alive." He gestured for the three warriors to help carry Palespeck's body.

"I will speak with Tanglestar about this tomorrow."

Adderstorm offered to be the main cat to carry her, the dead weight on his back made him sick to his stomach, but he still trailed after Heronstar. *I don't think RiverClan is to blame here. The prophecy has yet to pass, I'm sure that Palespeck's death was caused by someone closer to WindClan than we think.*

Chapter 25

The evening darkness moved upon the WindClan camp like a dark shadow devouring prey. Cats wept and shared tongues with Palespeck one last time. Adderstorm watched as Starlingwing sat next to Frostleap and Pebblepelt, nuzzling their shoulders and speaking words of comfort. Redstripe padded out of the medicine den finally, his ears went back in grief when he saw Palespeck's corpse.

We're all slowly losing hope. And Heronstar needs to pick the new deputy by moonhigh. It must be a difficult decision to make when you're grieving. Adderstorm thought. It was his turn to share tongues with Palespeck. He quietly stepped over to the former deputy's body, which was cleaned up and smelling a lot nicer thanks to Silveroak's help.

"May you find peace in StarClan, Palespeck. We will all miss you." The brown tabby leaned down, pressing his nose into her fur. His nose was met with a cold, stiff sensation and he shuddered. No matter how many cats he sat vigil for, he figured he would never get used to how a corpse felt under his touch. Cold and lifeless.

He stepped back to let other cats sit with her, bumping into Hollywish. The she-cat looked up at him miserably, "Remember when we all trained together?" her mew was shaky.

"Yeah, of course, I do. She was a great mentor to you, Hollywish." Adderstorm's voice softened and he settled next to her as they both watched cats come and go from Palespeck.

The silver dappled she-cat let out a sigh, "She was. And she would have made a great leader as well. I can't imagine any cat doing a better job as her in the deputy position." Her tail twitched and she glanced over at her father, Heronstar. The small gray tom was speaking with Silveroak outside her den, away from the earshot of others.

Adderstorm nodded in agreement, "But Heronstar does need to choose a cat. I'm sure whoever it is will do a fine job in filling Palespeck's paws."

"Are you completely mouse-brained?" Silveroak's spoke louder now. Adderstorm's ears perked up at the anger in her voice.

"We can't attack RiverClan tonight, you need to appoint a new deputy! Get those bees out of your head and realize that your clan comes first, Heronstar. Not battles." The medicine cat's words were harsh and demanding. Hollywish tensed, her claws flexing into the ground beneath her paws.

Heronstar growled back, trying to quiet the conversation, "I'm tired of us being treated like we're a clan of traitors. This so-called prophecy or warning from StarClan has yet to happen. Maybe RiverClan and Adderstorm were mistaken."

"StarClan are never mistaken, Heronstar. You know as well as I do talking with Tanglestar is the option you need to take. For tonight, you comfort your clanmates." Silveroak hissed, lashing her tail as she stormed away from her brother. Hollywish bounded over to Heronstar, leaving Adderstorm to himself.

When moonhigh came, Heronstar leapt up onto Sky Stone. His light gray fur ruffled slightly in the breeze. All cats looked up to him, waiting for the inevitable announcement of the new clan deputy. Badgerfur shushed her kits gently as she watched from the nursery entrance.

"Cats of WindClan, I stand before you here tonight, to express my grievances to Palespeck. She was an amazing warrior, a determined deputy, but she was murdered before she could ever accept her nine lives and lead this clan after me." Heronstar spoke, his voice booming through the camp.

"I say these words before StarClan, so that the spirits of our warrior ancestors and Palespeck may hear and approve of my choice. The new deputy of WindClan is *Embermask*."

"Embermask! Embermask! Embermask!" The clan chanted.

Adderstorm's stress faded away, Embermask was certainly a great choice.

The kits immediately barrelled out of the nursery, their eyes wide with amazement. Badgerfur picked up Blossomkit by her scruff and put her back at the den entrance carefully, "All of you settle down, you can congratulate your father later." Badgerfur purred, her voice filled with pride for her mate. The kits mewed in protest, but the queen nudged them into their nests again.

"Tomorrow, I and a few other warriors will be going to speak to Tanglestar about the matter of Palespeck's death. I promise you all, I will not rest until I have a clear answer." Heronstar added, touching noses with the new deputy.

I only hope that this doesn't end in bloodshed.

Thistlejaw stepped into the ShadowClan camp, rays of morning sunlight warmed the stones that his clanmates lounged on during the warmest parts of the day. He dropped two mice into the fresh-kill pile and purred happily.

Ever since the snow had thawed and melted away, prey had been plentiful in the pine forest. And Thistlejaw was thankful for the freezing air being gone, every cat was. The sun's warmth made them feel relaxed and the promise of a well-stocked prey pile made them feel energetic.

Ebonyfern slowly padded over to him. Her dark striped fur was ruffled up nervously. Thistlejaw, despite not having many conversations since their argument, still was worried as to what the she-cat was so tense about.

"Hey, can we talk?" she asked in a timid mew.

Thistlejaw nodded, his yellow eyes blinking in confusion, "Is something wrong, Ebonyfern?"

The dark she-cat didn't answer immediately, only nudging the blue-gray tom with her muzzle toward the empty apprentice den and

nursery. Thistljeaw complied and sat next to her, out of earshot of other warriors.

"Not exactly? I mean...I don't really know what to think at this point." Ebonyfern sighed, curling her tail over her paws. She was usually one of the most chipper cats in camp, Thistlejaw had certainly noticed she'd been quieter than usual. These days she was often speaking or patrolling with Leopardwhisper.

"Well, what's bothering you, then?" Thistlejaw tilted his head quizzically.

Ebonyfern awkwardly shifted her paws, her amber eyes lowering to the ground, "I'm pregnant with Leopardwhisper's kits."

Can't exactly say I'm not surprised Thistlejaw thought. He had noticed the dark tabby she-cat's belly had swollen a little in the past moon, but he didn't know for sure if she was pregnant or not. Leopardwhisper seemed to have no idea or not care about the fact.

"That's wonderful news, Ebonyfern," he meowed gently, "Why are you worried?"

Ebonyfern's eyes darted from the warriors den to Thistlejaw, "Your brother has been acting strangely lately. I can't believe it took me telling him I was pregnant with his kits for me to notice it."

"That's what I've been trying to tell someone for moons," Thistlejaw grumbled in irritation. Ebonyfern shoved his chest with her paw sharply.

"Stop being such a pain in the tail, Thistlejaw!" she hissed, "I *want* us to be friends again, we stopped talking over a stupid argument. I have no other cat to trust with this information, *please* hear me out." Ebonyfern's amber eyes were full of desperation.

Of course, I'm not going to abandon her when she's like this. She's my clanmate and my friend! Whatever Leopardwhisper has done, I'll make sure to make it known that it won't be tolerated. Thistlejaw let out a defeated sigh, dropping his pride. "I'm sorry, Ebonyfern. You're right. I've been needlessly cold to you for too long. I promise to not

tell any other cat about this, just tell me what my brother has been doing."

Ebonyfern lowered her voice to a whisper once again, "Well, when I told him I was pregnant he didn't show any signs of being excited about it. He told me he was happy of course, but I didn't see any emotion in his eyes. He's become so distant from everyone lately, just like Aspenshade after Puddlecloud's death."

Thistlejaw tensed at the mention of his father and mother. She was right, Leopardwhisper *had* become like their father, but it didn't start when he was a warrior. His brother had displayed signs of emotionlessness when he was an older apprentice. And when he did show an emotion, it was usually negative and angry.

And now he has more than one pregnant mate! How dare he be so unfaithful!

Ebonyfern continued speaking, "He's also been saying things about the Clans and the Warrior Code, Thistlejaw. Bad things. All the times we've gone hunting together he's eaten his prey before we returned to camp, he forces me to not tell anyone about it."

And that would explain why Berryfur, Crowstrike, and Newtfire did the same thing when I went hunting with them. They all share the same views.

"He keeps saying that the Code is holding us back and that we'd be better off in a peaceful group without borders or enemies." Ebonyfern finished, her tail and whiskers twitching anxiously.

Thistlejaw's eyes narrowed into yellow slits, "He has bees in his brain if he really thinks life without rules would be *more* peaceful. Rogues are in constant battle with each other, clan cats have standards."

"You don't think I've tried telling him that, Thistlejaw? I'm not so easily swayed by his words. Not anymore. Life without battles sounds too good to be true." Ebonyfern said.

"That's because it is. It's unrealistic and he's just proving his

selfishness to ShadowClan." Thistlejaw lashed his tail, his claws flexing with annoyance. Ebonyfern pressed her muzzle against his shoulder.

"Try to speak with him, Thistlejaw. You're his only hope."

Thistlejaw moved away from Ebonyfern's touch and nodded, "I will, Ebonyfern. Try not to worry, alright?"

"Alright.." she meowed, wandering to the fresh-kill pile to pick out a piece of prey. Thistlejaw's stomach was empty and rumbling in complaint, but his mind was racing from the information Ebonyfern had told him.

I can't eat, not now. I have to find out a way to bring it up without having him get angry with me. I'll speak with Adderstorm tonight, maybe he can help.

"Palespeck's dead!?" Thistlejaw's mouth was agape at the news, he couldn't believe that the WindClan deputy had been killed so suddenly. Adderstorm sat beside him on the branch of the oak tree, his striped head nodding.

"RiverClan's scent was all over her pelt and we found her body near their border. I'm afraid we'll be in an all-out war against them soon if Heronstar and Tanglestar can't come to some agreement." He sighed and looked up at Thistlejaw. The dark blue-gray tom hummed in thought.

"Hm, well, if RiverClan did kill her, they deserve to get their pelts slashed off." He shrugged his shoulders, "Killing a warrior in battle is one thing, but killing a deputy in cold blood? It's sort of unforgivable."

"That's the thing, Thistlejaw. I don't think it *was* RiverClan. I think a cat disguised their scent and left Palespeck's body where Heronstar would put the blame on RiverClan instead!" Adderstorm looked out on the moor in the direction of RiverClan territory.

"You're clever, Adderstorm. If anyone can figure this out, it's you."

Thistlejaw licked Adderstorm's cheek lovingly, causing the other tom to purr.

"I don't know about that, but I *am* clever enough to know that you're dying to tell me something. You've been fidgeting ever since we climbed up here." The brown tabby's tail swayed below the branch.

Nothing gets past him. Thistlejaw nearly purred with pride. The brown tom had grown so much mentally and physically since they'd first met. WindClan was lucky to have a warrior like him on their side.

"It's my brother, I know I keep bothering you about it, but my old friend in ShadowClan finally started talking to me again today. She told me she was pregnant with his kits, how he didn't seem to care. And apparently, now he's completely disregarding the Code and the Clans altogether." Thistlejaw explained, earning a wide-eyed reaction out of the other tom. He appeared to be reflecting on something before he spoke.

"That's not good Thistlejaw. If he's willingly turning his back against the Clans, it needs to be reported to your leader or deputy."

"I wanted to speak with him about it first. Besides, I have no evidence of him doing it. Mintstar would think I'm crazy." Thistlejaw protested, his ears drawing back in shame.

A sudden silence fell upon them both. The breeze rustled the pine trees on ShadowClan territory and the grass on the WindClan moor. The babbling creek sounded much louder than it had been before.

Then, a yowl of fear echoed from the ShadowClan border. Cutting through the silence like razor-sharp claws. It made both Thistlejaw and Adderstorm's hearts and breathing stop for a brief moment.

"Leopardwhisper, you can't do this! Please don't do this to me!"

Chapter 26

Thistlejaw and Adderstorm didn't waste any time asking each other what was going on, they quickly climbed down the tree and raced to where the distressed she-cat voice was yowling. Thistlejaw didn't care whether or not Adderstorm crossed the border, the WindClan warrior was faster than him and ran ahead of him urgently.

They arrived in a clearing on ShadowClan territory near the Thunderpath. Leopardwhisper had his gaze steady on a calico she-cat, who had her back arched and her fur spiked up threateningly. Blood trickled down her body from several bites and claw marks. Thistlejaw recognized the cat as Pandora.

"Leopardwhisper! What is the meaning of this?!" He growled, storming up to the black spotted tom. His brother chuckled and kept his eyes on Pandora, who was shivering in fear.

"Isn't it obvious? I'm defending our territory from low-life kittypets!" Leopardwhisper hissed. He ignored Thistlejaw's approach and leapt at Pandora, his claws hooking into her neck and shoulder. Adderstorm watched in horror as the black tom wasted no time in violently ripping his claws across the she-cat's throat. The scarlet blood stained her white patches of fur pink and red.

Pandora squirmed and gasped for air, "M-my k-kits...please! S-save t-them!" She sputtered, staring at Adderstorm. She began to hack on her own blood as it bubbled out of her mouth and her body completely stilled.

Thistlejaw couldn't believe what he'd just witnessed. His own brother just killed his mate, leaving his kits motherless and alone. The rage he had built up inside himself for many moons was finally starting to surface. He hissed and unsheathed his claws, glaring at Leopardwhisper furiously.

"She wasn't just a kittypet though, was she Leopardwhisper? You killed your own mate, you killed her in cold blood! I'm ashamed to

call you my brother, you monster!" He jumped at the other ShadowClan tom. And he was met with Leopardwhisper's claws across his head, cutting through his ear.

Leopardwhisper hissed back at him, "She wasn't my mate. She was nothing more than a she-cat to carry my kits. They are future of the Clans. The revolution, brother!" he bashed himself against Thistlejaw's side, sending the blue-gray tom tumbling across the forest floor.

Adderstorm watched the two ShadowClan brothers, wanting to protect Thistlejaw more than anything in the world. However, he wasn't going to let that snake-hearted cat get his paws on innocent kits.

The brown tabby slinked into the bushes, keeping his ears perked for any noises. Whiny, helpless mews started erupting from under a clump of ferns. He pulled back a fern leaf with his paw carefully, revealing three tiny, practically newborn kits. Adderstorm's heart sunk when he realized that these kits would live their lives without their real mother. *All because of their brute of a father.*

He gently made his way under the ferns, wrapping himself around the kits protectively. The sound of Leopardwhisper and Thistlejaw fighting made him feel sick to his stomach. *If he dies when I could've helped him, I'm never going to forgive myself.* But Adderstorm had a feeling that this is what Thistlejaw would want him to do, protect the innocent.

Thistlejaw slammed his paws against Leopardwhisper's chest, knocking the breath out of the black tom briefly. The scent of blood filled his lungs as he kept a paw against Leopardwhisper's neck, "You're my brother! I trusted you, I wanted you to have a fulfilling life. For StarClan's sake! I thought one day you might make a great leader of ShadowClan. Why have you done this to yourself?" Tears misted his yellow eyes.

Both Leopardwhisper's yellow and amber eyes stared up at Thistlejaw, his lips drawing into a sneer, "You're not following the Code either, Thistlejaw. In fact, you've broken it. I know about your little secret meetings with that WindClan cat. How you're in love

with a *tom*."

Thistlejaw's throat tightened, "T-that's not an answer. Stop making me look like the worst cat that's ever walked the clan!"

The black tom chuckled lowly, "You're a hypocrite, Thistlejaw. Tell me, do you think if we were raised outside the Clans that our mother would have died? That our father would've turned into a fox-heart? No, it's because of the violence and vengeful ways of the Clans that Puddlecloud got killed!"

"So your solution is to kill a she-cat that carried your kits? To take another mate in ShadowClan?" Thistlejaw growled angrily, more tears blurred his vision and he shakily stepped away from Leopardwhisper.

Leopardwhisper took the opportunity to pin Thistlejaw down, his fangs glinting in the moonlight, "I'll do what I have to, to make a better life for the cats I care about. But you're too much of a useless coward to understand, brother. Oh well, I'll make sure you keep this quiet." He raised his paw, his claws still unsheathed. Thistlejaw's blood pounded in his ears. *He's going to kill me!*

Without even thinking, Thistlejaw surged forward. He sank his fangs into Leopardwhisper's neck until bones crunched under the pressure of his jaw. The black tom slumped forward, laying heavily on top of Thistlejaw. The whirl of emotions and pain from his wounds broke him out of his defensive trance, he let go of his brother's throat and cried in grief against his black fur.

A chilling quiet filled the air, Adderstorm kept his tail draped around the kits as they desperately tried to suckle for milk at his stomach. "Sorry, little ones. I promise you'll have food soon enough," he whispered to them. Two she-kits and a tom. One of the she-kits was a calico like her mother, but with more ginger markings; the other was pure white except for two gray patches around her eyes; and finally, the tom was black with ginger markings.

You three will be safe and thrive among ShadowClan. He silently added to his promise. He waited until there was a sound of a twig snapping in front of him. Thistlejaw called out to him, his voice shaking, "Adderstorm? Are you still here?"

"Yes, Thistlejaw, come here quickly!" Adderstorm called out, relief washed over him as Thistlejaw stepped out from the bushes. He was alive and well. *But if that's the case, then Leopardwhisper must be---*

Thistlejaw's breath caught in his throat, "Are those Pandora's kits?" he slowly padded forward, examining the small squirming bodies. Adderstorm nodded and set his green eyes back on the kits tenderly, a part of him wanted to take the kits into WindClan and raise them himself, but they were Thistlejaw's kin, not his. ShadowClan had to be their home.

"We need to get them back to your camp. Are there any queens nursing kits?"

Thistlejaw shook his head, "No, not currently. Ebonyfern is pregnant but I don't *think* she's able to produce milk just yet?"

Adderstorm picked up one of the she-kits by the scruff and gestured with his tail for Thistlejaw to carry the other two. The ShadowClan tom complied, grasping the two kits in his bloodstained mouth. The two warriors wandered in silence until they reached the camp.

Ottertail was thankfully the one to spot them first, his fur stood on end when he noticed Adderstorm, but when he saw the tiny kit hanging from his mouth he questioningly let them into camp.

"Thistlejaw, why have you brought a WindClan warrior and kits into our camp?"

Thistlejaw carefully set the kits down so he could speak, "These three kits are Leopardwhisper's. Their mother was a kittypet." His voice was clear and loud enough to reach the ears of Crowstrike and Berryfur, who were sitting next to the fresh-kill pile.

Adderstorm felt extremely out of place in the tree-shrouded camp, but he summoned up enough courage to set the she-kit down and

step up to the ShadowClan deputy, "Leopardwhisper murdered his mate in cold blood, I was witness to it, as was Thistlejaw."

The big brown tabby's eyes widened with astonishment, "Leopardwhisper and a *kittypet*? And he killed her? Where is he?"

Crowstrike bounded up to them, his green eyes were narrowed into slits, "How can we trust the word of a WindClan cat. Why were you and Thistlejaw in the same place at the same time?"

"That's exactly what I want to know as well," a gruff voice of an older tom added.

Both Adderstorm and Thistlejaw whipped their heads toward the tom. Adderstorm instantly recognized his blue-gray fur and scarred pelt. It was Aspenshade.

"Leopardwhisper would never have a kittypet as a mate, let alone kill her. You're both lying." Aspenshade growled, "Take those kits back where they came from and leave, rabbit-chaser!"

"Enough, Aspenshade." Ottertail intervened then turned back to Thistlejaw, "Please, answer my question, Thistlejaw. Where is Leopardwhisper now?"

Adderstorm looked over at Thistlejaw. The blue-gray tom's yellow eyes were full of sorrow and anger. He didn't look like even he had processed what had happened earlier. He lowered his head and hid his tears from everyone who was staring at him.

"He's dead. Leopardwhisper is dead. He attacked me and I was trying to defend myself, I ended up killing him to save my own life."

Chapter 27

Aspenshade's whiskers shook in disbelief. He didn't say a word for several heartbeats and Thistlejaw exchanged an anxious glance with Adderstorm. The old warrior eventually hissed in fury, "You killed your own brother...*traitor!* You're a traitor to your clan and your kin!" His amber eyes flared with a mix grief and rage.

Thistlejaw flinched, stepping back from his father. *I've messed up. Maybe there was a way I could have handled the situation so that both of us came out alive. Now I'm a murderer..I'll be banished.* He didn't dare look into any of his clanmates' eyes.

Ottertail's gaze was focused firmly on Thistlejaw. Clearly, the deputy didn't know what to make of his confession. Yet regardless of it, he stayed calm, which was more than Thistlejaw could say about Aspenshade. His father's claws unsheathed and he lunged viciously at him.

Adderstorm's brown-and-white fur blurred in the corner of his eye. The WindClan warrior stood in front of Thistlejaw protectively, his back arched in warning, "Don't you lay a claw on him! He was only protecting himself. If you really think Thistlejaw would *want* to intentionally harm a hair on his brother's pelt then you don't know your own son at all!" The tom spat in his father's face.

The WindClan tom standing up for Thistlejaw only made Aspenshade angrier. His unsheathed claws gripped the ground beneath his paws and his fur spiked on his back. "Well, a WindClan cat should know *nothing* about my son. *Unless* he's been breaking the Code in more ways than just murdering a clanmate.." his voice rumbled into a dark purr of accusation.

"*Stop this!* Aspenshade, sheath your claws." Mintstar's commanding voice boomed over the forest hollow. Adderstorm backed away from the senior warrior and settled down on the ground to lap his tongue against the tiny kits to keep them warm. Thistlejaw sighed a breath of relief, though his body was still tense thinking of what

decision she'd come to.

The gray she-cat stared down at the three squirming kits and her pale green eyes softened, "You say that these are Leopardwhisper's kits?"

Ottertail nodded and explained what happened to the she-cat. Her gaze on the kits grew solemn and she lowered her head, "I've suspected his disloyalty, but I never thought he'd kill his own mate. Thank you for bringing the kits to us, Adderstorm. ShadowClan respects your compassion."

Aspenshade glowered at both Thistlejaw and Adderstorm, "And what about Thistlejaw? He killed a clanmate! Surely you'll be banishing him!"

Mintstar turned her head to Aspenshade, her green eyes narrowing into slits, "According to Thistlejaw *and* Adderstorm, Leopardwhisper would have been the first to attack. I don't see why Adderstorm would have any reason to lie to us. If he *wanted* to lie, he'd want Thistlejaw to be banished so our numbers of clan members would drop."

Adderstorm drew his tail over the three kits protectively, "Mintstar, if you have no queens to nurse them, I can take them to WindClan until they're old enough to eat prey." When Mintstar opened her mouth to reply, a new voice sounded from behind her.

"Nonsense, I can nurse them just fine, my milk came in a few sunrises ago." Ebonyfern stepped up to Adderstorm. Thistlejaw's tail drooped in empathy for the she-cat. *She most likely had no idea Leopardwhisper had another mate!*

The dark tabby she-cat picked up two kits by their scruffs and carried them to the nursery. Adderstorm followed with the last kit dangling from his grip with a hungry wail of protest. Thistlejaw's yellow gaze set on his leader and deputy sorrowfully, "Punish me, Mintstar. I deserve it after what I did tonight" he said.

The ShadowClan leader's eyes widened in surprise and she rested her muzzle against his shoulder, "I think you're already punishing

yourself enough, Thistlejaw. Go try to get some rest."

Adderstorm bounded back to Thistlejaw's side and he gently dragged his tail over the tom's flank. Though the brown tabby didn't say any words, the gesture was clear enough. *He's trying to comfort me, but he can't, not in front of my clan. I don't deserve his kindness.*

"Adderstorm, please show us where Leopardwhisper's body is. I'll send a warrior to guide you back to your territory afterward." The dark she-cat padded to the camp entrance, flicking her tail to Marshfoot, Crowstrike, and Swiftflower as a sign to accompany her. Adderstorm met Thistlejaw's gaze one last time in sympathy before he walked out of camp, leading the others to Leopardwhisper's body.

Thistlejaw felt like his insides were tightened and twisted. *There's no way I'll be able to get any sleep tonight. My dreams would be filled with blood.* He cringed at the thought and made his way to the nursery to check on Ebonyfern and the kits.

"Hey, Thistlejaw." Ebonyfern's greeting was soft, but behind it, he could sense her grief. The three kits were suckling at her quietly. Now that he had a moment to properly look at them, Thistlejaw was surprised to find them all quite beautiful. The little black-and-ginger tom gave a little sneeze. Meanwhile, his two sisters clambered in to get more milk.

The tip of Ebonyfern's tail flicked in thought, "I always knew Leopardwhisper was hiding something. I just didn't think it was that. I should be angry or relieved I know that, but I'm not, Thistlejaw." The tabby she-cat's voice quivered in frustration.

"I'm *heartbroken* and *confused*. Confused about *why* he became the way he did, he was such a trustworthy and kind apprentice. As soon as he became a warrior he seemed to think he should boss everyone around...and then he wanted to destroy the Code." Ebonyfern sniffled and a mist of tears formed in her amber eyes.

Thistlejaw's heart sank at the sight and he pressed his muzzle against his friend's neck, "Aspenshade was a part of the problem. He trained Leopardwhisper vigourously, taught him how to view the

world. I wouldn't be surprised he's the one who told him that nonsense about living without the Code too."

Ebonyfern's reply never came, she broke down into wails and sobs into Thistlejaw's thick blue-gray pelt. For a long time, the two stayed like that until Ebonyfern's crying stopped. Thistlejaw's ears perked up when he heard his clanmates' grieving voices. *Mintstar and the others must've returned with Leopardwhisper.*

His yellow eyes looked down at the dark she-cat, who moved away from his touch to check on the kits by her belly. "I know they aren't my kits, but they'll be mine and Leopardwhisper's kin. I can't just turn them away. Would you help me name them, Thistlejaw?" Ebonyfern's amber eyes brightened a little. He nodded in response, naming the kits would certainly be a pleasant and distracting task for the time being.

Ebonyfern pointed her tail at the small black-and-ginger tom, "I want to call him Rosekit" she said.

"What? But Rosekit is a she-cat name!" Thistlejaw chuckled in amusement. Ebonyfern gently cuffed him around the ear.

"It is *not* just a she-cat name, you furball. Toms can be just as sweet as she-cats, and this little guy has been the gentlest of the three," she huffed and looked back down at the kits. The white she-kit with gray patches around her eyes mewled softly at the sound of Ebonyfern talking. "And I think Swankit fits that one perfectly," she decided.

"Thought you wanted my help with naming them?" Thistlejaw's whiskers twitched, "There's only one left!"

"You deserve it after poking fun at Rosekit's name!" She teased gently, "But go ahead and name the last one, I promise I won't judge your choice."

Thistlejaw thought for many heartbeats as he looked at the tiny calico she-kit. Then, he finally answered, "Adderstorm would've given his life to protect these kits from Leopardwhisper. I know he's a WindClan cat, but he's one of the kindest warriors I've met. I want

to call her Snakekit to thank him."

Ebonyfern blinked in shock at Thistlejaw's declaration for a brief moment, then she curled her tail around the three kits and nodded, "I think that's a great name. Thank you, Thistlejaw."

His fur still prickled with anxiety as the reality of the events that night came back to him, "Ebonyfern, I'm *so* sorry that I killed him---"

The she-cat immediately cut him off, "Don't apologize. You were only defending yourself, I understand that. Leopardwhisper became as cruel as your father. At least this way no cat, not even his kits will have to face his wrath."

Tawnyclaw poked her head into the nursery, "Ah, there you are Thistlejaw. I came to give you some poppy seeds to help you sleep tonight and to check on the kits." The medicine cat held a poppy pod between her teeth and shook two seeds onto her paw.

Thistlejaw lapped the dark seeds up with his tongue and let out a sigh, "Has the vigil started yet?"

Tawnyclaw's brilliant yellow-green eyes darted from the camp clearing back to Thistlejaw, "Yes, but I'm sure they'll understand if you don't want to stick around." Thistlejaw moved past the medicine cat, stepping out into the hollow.

Leopardwhisper's lifeless body was carefully placed where ShadowClan could share tongues one last time. Mintstar was speaking in hushed tones to Ottertail, while the rest of the clan mourned and shot glares and hissed quietly at the sight of Thistlejaw.

If I wasn't feeling accepted by my clanmates before, I'm sure they'll make it known that I'm not now. I hope Mintstar has tried explaining the situation to them. His attention was caught by Berryfur, Crowstrike, and Newtfire huddled near the base of a pine tree away from the earshot of others. The fur on his back spiked up in rage. They didn't even look upset! So much for them being friends with Leopardwhisper.

Thistlejaw felt the effects of the poppy seeds kicking in. His courage swelled in his chest and he stormed over to the small group of toms. Berryfur was the first to notice him, and the silver-and-black striped tom growled, "Come to kill us too, *traitor*?"

More like I'd want to just claw those smug looks off your muzzles. Thistlejaw thought bitterly, "You three and Leopardwhisper were and *are* a bunch of fox-hearts. Your loyalties should lie with ShadowClan, not yourselves. If you think any differently you should just consider leaving *now*."

Without waiting for their reactions, Thistlejaw turned and walked off to the warriors den, forcing himself to look away from his brother's corpse. Once he was curled up tightly in his nest of moss, he couldn't help but notice a heavy feeling of dread in his stomach.

This isn't over yet, StarClan's warning wasn't just about Leopardwhisper. It has to be a part of something far bigger than him.

Chapter 28

Anxiety fluttered in Adderstorm's chest, causing him to gasp awake in his nest. Green eyes darted from side to side, checking for danger. There was nothing to be heard or seen besides the chirps of birds searching for morning meals and the chilling breeze from outside the warriors' den.

His muscles relaxed at his realization. No other cat knew about the incident with ShadowClan. He had made sure to cover up their forest scent as much as he could before heading into camp. However, the memory of the intense face-off between him and Aspenshade, and not to mention the sheer grief Thistlejaw was going through with having to kill his own brother, still made his fur spike.

Adderstorm stepped out of the den, making sure not to step on any cat's tails. The sky was gray, with clouds rolling in the distance. He put his nose to the sky and inhaled deeply, sure enough, the scent of incoming rain was prominent in the air. *Perfect for hiding my scent! I'll try to catch Thistlejaw on a patrol later. Things were so hectic at ShadowClan camp, I could hardly get a word out to him. I need to know if he's okay.*

The WindClan camp wasn't bustling like it usually was. Palespeck's body had already been taken out to be buried and any cats that were outside their dens were either on patrol or eating from the fresh-kill pile.

The brown tabby strode across the clearing to pick up a mouse in his jaws, but as he opened his mouth a searing pain burned behind his eyes. He hissed loudly while his claws unsheathed and dug into the ground. When he went to open up his eyes all he could see was inky blackness. *Did I go blind?* Adderstorm panicked.

Starry transparent figures of cats circled around him. Their eyes were glowing full of concern and the first cat to speak, Adderstorm immediately recognized as Jaytuft's voice.

"Adderstorm, today is the day. You must stop her before it's too late. You must.*"*

Another voice echoed in the darkness, a commanding she-cat voice that certainly had to belong to Palespeck.

"ShadowClan is finished with their end of the prophecy, but WindClan is still in grave danger if she gets away with any more of this!"

Adderstorm's head pounded with pain and he grit his teeth to keep himself from crying out. StarClan was speaking to him, he didn't want to ruin anything by not hearing them over his own yowls.

"Please help our clan! Justice must be served!" A third voice pleaded. This time it was unfamiliar. Adderstorm turned his head to look at the tom. Beneath the stars in his pelt, he could make out dusty brown fur.

"Yes, Dustblaze. Badgerfur has a new litter of kits to take care of, I will not stand idly by while this madness ensues. Someone has to do something about it." A fourth voice coming from Thrushspirit said.

"Remember, Adderstorm, even the most loyal of cats can stray from the Warrior Code," Palespeck whispered in a bitter hiss into his ear. With that, the StarClan cats faded away, as did the darkness around him.

He opened his eyes to find himself stretched along the grass. His breathing came in rapid inhales and exhales. Silveroak stood over him, her blue eyes wide in worry, "Adderstorm, can you hear me?"

Adderstorm groaned in response and shakily managed to sit up, "I'm fine. Just felt a little dizzy." He hated lying to the medicine cat, but something in him didn't feel like he should be telling Silveroak about his warnings anymore. *They only seem to cause a rift between her and Heronstar.*

"What's wrong with him, Momma?" Doekit mewled to Badgerfur. The black-and-white queen simply shushed the pale ginger she-kit and guided her back into the nursery. "Let Silveroak do her work, I'm sure Adderstorm is just hungry is all," she said.

Silveroak pondered Adderstorm's response and flicked her tail, "Well, that's not good. Have you drunk any water recently? Let's try with that and prey and if you still feel like something is off, be sure to come and see me."

Adderstorm nodded at the silver-and-white she-cat and proceeded to feast on the mouse he had picked out earlier. His mind still raced from the warning that StarClan had given him. *Something is going to happen* today. He swallowed his last mouthful of the mouse while he thought. *And apparently, the traitor amongst us is a she-cat. That doesn't seem right, all the she-cats I've spoken to haven't been the least bit suspicious. Maybe StarClan was mistaken?*

Heronstar stormed into the camp, his tail held high in agitation. Robinbriar, Redstripe, Pebblepelt, and Hollywish all followed behind him looking fretful. Right. Adderstorm nearly forgot that Heronstar was going to go to RiverClan and speak with Tanglestar.

"How did it go?" Adderstorm whispered to Hollywish when she walked toward him. The dappled she-cat frowned and sat next to him meekly, "Not good, Adderstorm we---" Hollywish's explanation was cut-off by Heronstar climbed onto the Sky Stone.

"WindClan, I have bad news. Tanglestar still refuses that RiverClan were the ones who attacked and killed Palespeck. Today we will engage in battle with them. If Tanglestar wants to spout out lies then it is their demise." He announced.

Adderstorm's eyes widened at Heronstar and he stared at Hollywish in disbelief, "We can't do this, Hollywish. RiverClan wants us *gone,* if we go to battle with them they'll be out for blood! We'll lose warriors!"

Hollywish's dark blue eyes were filled with sadness, "I know that Adderstorm, but my father is truly convinced that RiverClan murdered Palespeck. All the evidence points to it."

"Do you have a problem with my decision, Adderstorm?" The small gray tom on the stone questioned. A jolt of nervousness made a lump form in the brown tabby's throat. *I can't just sit here in silence while we get into a war that may be all for nothing!*

"Yes, actually. I do have a problem with it." Adderstorm stood up on all four paws, though his legs were quivering slightly from the adrenaline of arguing with the clan leader. "I know Palespeck was found at a RiverClan border with their scent on her. But what else do we have to go off of besides that? Tanglestar and many other RiverClan members are *denying* it. Why not take their word for it?"

Heronstar's blue eyes narrowed into slits. For the first time in his days of living amongst WindClan, Adderstorm truly felt not only his leader's dominant nature but his desperate need to protect his clan. The small gray tom shook his head in disappointment, "No, Adderstorm. You're wrong on this. You cannot take the words of your enemy as fact. I'm organizing a battle patrol right now as well as a backup patrol and camp guards. We will avenge Palespeck *today*, not a moment more."

Frustrated, Adderstorm watched as Heronstar put together the main battle patrol consisting of Fawnpool, Robinbriar, Hollywish, and Frostleap. After putting together the backup patrol he told Adderstorm to guard the camp while they were away.

Great, just great! Cats might die today because of this! All because I couldn't find a good excuse for who really killed Palespeck. Adderstorm growled to himself and started to walk towards the camp entrance once Heronstar and the backup patrol had left.

Silveroak padded out of her den and hopped up onto the Sky Stone, distracting Adderstorm from the camp entrance. *What is she doing now? There's barely any cats here to address!* He thought. His clanmates all clamored to the base of the Sky Stone, being as curious as he was to know what the medicine cat wanted to say.

"Cats of WindClan...I must first apologize for not being able to talk sense to my brother. He's always wanting what's best for us, but can never realize that violence doesn't solve our issues. Battles, war, fighting in general? It's completely *mouse-brained*." The silver-and-white she-cat said.

The few cats at the base of the stone murmured to each other with an apprehensive agreement, but there was still confusion in their gazes. Silveroak let out a sigh and continued, "Peace could reign on

all of us if we stopped being so battle-hungry and territorial. Whose to say we cannot live a life like that?"

The fur on Adderstorm's neck began to spike with uneasiness. The calmness of the she-cat's voice was hauntingly menacing in a strange way. A yowl of warning suddenly came from the elder, Oatstep. Adderstorm and the other warriors whipped their heads around to see the sight of warriors from different clans step into the WindClan camp in a large group.

Adderstorm recognized ShadowClan's medicine cat apprentice Berryfur, Crowstrike, Newtfire. As well as ThunderClan's Tigerfrost and Mothcloud and RiverClan's Spiderstripe. The rest were a few warriors he'd seen at Gatherings but didn't quite know their names. Adderstorm and the rest of the WindClan cats hissed at the intruders, ready to attack.

Silveroak yowled from the top of the Sky Stone, "*Enough!* Don't engage in battle with them. They're here to help you all, as am I."

Adderstorm's heart pounded in his chest. *This is wrong. Something isn't right. Why is Silveroak just accepting all these cats into our camp?* Somehow deep down, he knew the answer, but he was too shocked to even comprehend it.

The medicine cat continued her speech, "We have found a haven, beyond our territories. Those who want to share it and live a life without war and be in harmony, unlike the rest of the Clans, join us. Medicine cats will lead, as we should. We are connected to our ancestors and we heal and care for our clanmates"

Thoughts swirled in Adderstorm's mind. The realization slowly sinking in as he remembered the words of his dead clanmates. "*You must stop her before it's too late."* His pale green eyes stared up at the medicine cat. *It's her. She...she's the cat that they were warning me about! A medicine cat has to be practically the most loyal cat in the clan. To heal. To speak with StarClan. If that loyalty is swayed it could destroy a clan!*

The tom quickly stepped forward and glared at the cat who he once held trust for, "You're our *only* medicine cat! You'd leave us without

a second thought? We'll all perish. You're not being selfless, Silveroak, you'd be putting cats' lives in danger for you so-called *'peace'*."

The silver-and-white she-cat's eyes filled with a mix of anger and sorrow, "Sacrifices must be made in order to achieve peace, that much I know. I have killed many of our own warriors with poisons such as foxglove seeds and deadly nightshade. I do regret my actions deeply, but I *had* to!"

Adderstorm couldn't believe his ears were hearing the medicine cat's words. *Poisoning her own clanmates? How delusional is she?! How could that help anyone?* Other WindClan warriors gasped and growled at Silveroak for her betrayal.

"Some were warriors who wished to join our group but failed to see the point. To stop our secret from getting out I had to kill them. Then, there were some cats who were suffering from their ailments, such as Streamheart." Silveroak said.

"You're a traitor to not only us, but to StarClan as well!" Badgerfur hissed, keeping her kits hidden from the rest of Silveroak's group, "Heronstar will be ashamed to call you his sister once he hears the truth!"

"Shut your mouth! Nobody cares what that pathetic tom has to say!" Berryfur spat at the nursery queen.

Adderstorm's paws felt frozen to the ground. It all made sense now, the pieces of the puzzle fitting together perfectly. Silveroak had poisoned several cats, that's why they never had a scratch on them at the time of their death. It's why even the healthiest of warriors had died suddenly. *How could I have been so blind?*

Silveroak scolded Berryfur's outburst and leaped down from the Sky Stone. She expectantly looked at her clanmates for any willing cats to join her and the others. Her ice blue eyes fell upon Adderstorm and she lowered her voice into a soft purr, "Adderstorm, you saw how nonsensical Heronstar was being, you were the only warrior to stand up to him. You're smart and brave, you would be a wonderful addition to our group. Just like your mother would have been if she

were still here."

The brown tabby could barely breathe. The rage bubbled inside him, making his ears pin back with anger, "I would *never* join you after this Silveroak. You were very welcoming to me when I first joined WindClan, I enjoyed being around you. But you've lost my trust. You are no longer on my side."

The medicine cat's eyes narrowed and she respectfully dipped her head, "Very well, you've made your choice. It will cost you your life, but at least you're decisive. Let's go." She meowed to the group, leading them out of the WindClan camp. Adderstorm stared at them, his stomach twisting with dread.

"I'm going to follow them," he glanced at Redstripe, who looked completely frightened, "Redstripe. Protect the camp while I'm gone."

The reddish-brown tabby's yellow eyes softened and he let out a shaky sigh, "Be safe young one."

Adderstorm nodded and raced out of the camp. Storm clouds towered overhead in the darkened sky. The tom could hear the rumble of thunder getting louder with each passing moment. He didn't rest until he spotted Silveroak in the distance, leading her cats toward the RiverClan border.

Chapter 29

The brown-and-white tabby's ears perked up at the sound of a battle yowl coming from over the hill next to the RiverClan border. *Heronstar must've waited until a RiverClan patrol came!* Adderstorm decided to move slowly across the ground, not wanting to be seen by any cat, which would prove difficult on the moorland.

Silveroak's group had disbanded once they had reached this hill. The mix of warriors and medicine cats running off toward the end of WindClan territory, while Silveroak remained focused on getting to the battle. The constant sinking feeling in his stomach told him it certainly wasn't to help heal the injured WindClan warriors.

Once he got to the top of the hill he pressed his belly against the ground, even more, lowering his head so that he could discreetly track the silver she-cat's movements. Of course, Silveroak's presence among WindClan warriors was nothing out of the ordinary. None of them needed assistance so they urged the medicine cat away from the battle. She obliged, moving behind Heronstar in a few swift bounds.

Adderstorm unsheathed his claws as Silveroak lowered herself to the ground, ready to pounce on her brother in an attack. He didn't waste any time leaping forward and ran towards the medicine cat at full speed to pin her to the grass.

As soon as his paws forcefully hit the she-cat's shoulders, a bright bolt of lightning struck the ground. It rattled and shook every cat to their core, causing a ringing noise in Adderstorm's ears. He hissed and drew his paws over his ears painfully, no other sounds seemed to exist until many moments later.

A crackling of a fire and the smell of smoke were the first things he noticed, still laying on the dry grass with Silveroak by his side. The second thing he heard was the frantic sounds of his clanmates and the RiverClan cats. Thirdly, came the aggressive yowl from

Silveroak, who scrambled to her paws and ripped her claws against Adderstorm's muzzle.

Adderstorm cried out in pain and jumped away, his eyesight had finally set back in too, and the sight before him, made his breathing nearly stop. Orange and yellow flames flickered around them, easily catching fire to the dry blades of grass. Heronstar and the others fled away from the flames to the safety of the winding river.

Blood trickled from the wound on Adderstorm's muzzle and dripped on the ground below. Silveroak's ice blue eyes were furious and psychotic, "*You*, you're the cat that started ruining it all with your questioning and your prophecy! You're no better than my brother!"

He was taken aback by Silveroak's anger but stood far away from the she-cat in hopes she wouldn't bother attacking him again.

"I thought you would be *perfect* as my apprentice. The son of *Hawkeyes*. Your mother and I were best friends you know? You have her rage, her determination. But you lack her fearlessness...what a disappointment you turned out to be." Silveroak spat. The fire started towering even higher behind the she-cat.

Adderstorm growled out at the mention of his mother, "I *never* wanted to be like her, *ever.* Silveroak, I looked up to you. We all did. But I will not let you destroy the Clans. We may be ferocious to each other at times, but we all believe in loyalty."

The heat from the flames was noticeable now, and smoke began filling the air, causing Adderstorm to wheeze when he was talking. Silveroak snarled with annoyance, lunging forward and shoving Adderstorm to the ground. *That look in her eyes is the same as what my mother looked like before her death. Nothing but anger...*

"Your mind is gone, Silveroak. I pity you, I really do. And I'm sorry...whoever hurt you, whatever hurt you. You didn't deserve it. You were an amazing medicine cat despite all the terrible things you've done." Adderstorm said calmly.

Silveroak coughed from the smoke filling her lungs and sank her claws into his chest, "Shut your mouth! I don't *need* your pity! I

don't even need the *stars* to tell me that I'm *right* in doing all this. I'm helping cats, as I was born to do. Medicine cats deserve more than healing, they deserve leadership. We are not weak, we're the strongest cats in the clan!"

Adderstorm raked his hind claws against the she-cats belly, managing to turn and run away to a less fiery part of the meadow. His chest heaved from the smoke in his lungs and he stopped a moment to pant harshly.

A mass of muscle and fur bashed against his ribs, sending him back into the dirt. Silveroak stood over him, her fangs flashing, "As long as you're breathing air, you'll try to stop me. Heronstar will try to stop me. Both of you need to be sacrificed, can't you see it's the honorable thing to do?!"

"Adderstorm?!" A voice called out from behind the flames. Adderstorm's eyes widened in shock when he had processed who it belonged to. *Thistlejaw? No, no! Get out of here you mouse-brain!* He thought desperately. Silveroak's ears twitched and her eyes filled with a sickening delight.

"Ah! Your ShadowClan lover is here to save the day, how sweet. Oh yes, Adderstorm I've known about your secret meetings with Thistlejaw for a *very* long time. So did Leopardwhisper, but I told him to keep it quiet from Mintstar. You two should thank me."

The brown tabby's eyes narrowed into slits as the she-cat continued, whispering into his ear, "A shame that he won't be able to save you this time."

Adderstorm glared up at Silveroak, summoning all of the strength he had to attack her again. His claws raked against the side of her face and he kicked her away. "You ruined his brother's life. If it wasn't for you he might still be alive. He might've still been good friends with Thistlejaw!" He couldn't hide his fury anymore. *All this time it was her fault. She swayed Leopardwhisper's mind and she just killed clanmates as if she was justified to do so!*

To his surprise, the silver she-cat underneath him chuckled and her blue eyes shined with excitement, "You look just like your mother

right now, perhaps I was mistaken. Go on. *Kill me, Adderstorm.* It won't change the impact that my ideas have made on certain cats. They will have their peaceful life, one way or another."

Adderstorm pondered the medicine cat's words. The heat of the flames was almost intolerable, causing Adderstorm to let out a hiss of discomfort. His claws dug into Silveroak's neck and he lowered his face, "If I am like my mother, we have one thing in common," he bared his fangs, "I don't let injustices of certain cats go unpunished."

His jaws clamped down on the she-cat's throat. She struggled and sputtered, but he kept biting until he heard a distinct crunch of her windpipe. A wave of heat and dizziness overcame him and he let go of the she-cat's body, stumbling into another cat.

"G-great StarClan... Heronstar help get Silveroak's body out of here, I'll get Adderstorm!" It was Thistlejaw's voice again. *He didn't leave me? What if every cat knows we're more than friends?* Worry flooded into Adderstorm's mind. Thistlejaw grabbed Adderstorm by the scruff of his neck and hauled him far away from the flames and down by the river where fresh air awaited him.

He was eventually laid on the cool, muddy ground of the RiverClan bank. His breathing was short and he felt a burning sensation in his throat. The blue-gray ShadowClan warrior explained to the other cats how he saw the smoke while hunting and decided to go see if WindClan needed any assistance.

Adderstorm wheezed and hacked, feeling weaker by every heartbeat. Thistlejaw looked down at him and nuzzled his face softly, "You're going to be alright, Adderstorm. You just need to get rid of the smoke. I promise you'll be alright." He murmured.

A cold raindrop fell onto Adderstorm's nose, followed by several others. Relief shuddered through his body, maybe it would be enough to put out the fire before it reached the camp. He hoped that Badgerfur's kits were safe and sound.

"Thistlejaw, I love you, you know that right?" Adderstorm strained to speak, his voice only coming out in a quiet rasp. Somehow it didn't seem to matter anymore if any cats listened to his confession.

All his worries had fled from his mind.

"Of course, I know that, Adderstorm. I love you too.." Thistlejaw replied shakily, resting his tail against Adderstorm's.

Many of the cats whispered to each other in confusion, but also with grief. *I don't understand. Why are they sad? They should be furious.* Adderstorm thought. The scent of Thistlejaw's fur seemed to enfold him in a comforting cocoon. His breathing became even shallower and his eyelids fell until there was nothing but quiet darkness.

Thistlejaw couldn't hear breathing nor a heartbeat. Reality came crashing down as he realized the cat he loved the most was dead. *I couldn't save him. I should've been able to save him! I was right there!* Thistlejaw thought and wailed miserably, burying his face against the WindClan warrior's brown pelt.

A long-haired dark brown tom with ginger patches bowed his head in sorrow, "He was one of our best warriors, and a former rogue no less. He will be missed."

"May you find peace and good hunting in StarClan, my friend." A dappled silver she-cat meowed on the verge of tears.

Thistlejaw didn't dare look at the lifeless body of his best friend and lover. He simply murmured against his fur with tears streaming down his face, "Goodbye, Adderstorm...we'll meet again one day. I love you so much."

Epilogue

Leaf-fall was upon the Clans once more. Five moons after Adderstorm's death and the shocking truth of what his brother had been up to all that time. Neither Berryfur nor Newtfire had come back to ShadowClan. Surprisingly enough, Crowstrike returned to camp three sunrises later apologizing and begging for Mintstar and the clan to take him back. She accepted but warned him that not every cat will be so quick to forgive him for his actions.

Thistlejaw looked over at the ShadowClan nursery. Outside it, Ebonyfern was cleaning Pandora's kits. Today would be their apprentice ceremony, much to her other litter of kits' protests. Luckily, Ebonyfern had only given birth to *two* kits, Yarrowkit and Coalkit, but the nursery was still quite overcrowded.

The blue-gray tom padded over to what he considered his closest kin. Swankit's ears perked up and she barreled into Thistlejaw excitedly, knocking the tom over.

"We get to be apprentices today, Thistlejaw!" the white she-cat mewed loudly.

Thistlejaw purred in amusement when the other two kits crowded around him. *They've all grown so much. They'll make excellent warriors.*

Snakekit bounced around Rosekit happily, "I wonder who'll be our mentors. I hope I don't get grumpy old Dovedapple!"

Ebonyfern gently scolded the calico she-cat, "Ssh, that's rude little one. Dovedapple isn't old she's just a more experienced warrior. You could learn a lot from her despite her temper."

Rosekit was the quietest of the bunch. The black tom with ginger markings hardly got himself into any trouble. Ebonyfern mentioned that perhaps Rosekit would one day make a good medicine cat, but he insisted on becoming a warrior.

Tawnyclaw really does need an apprentice though. After learning about Berryfur's betrayal she's been cautious of working with any other cat. Not that Thistlejaw could blame her. WindClan's only medicine cat was the leader of the whole rebellion. Lilywhisker and Sheepbounce of RiverClan decided to set aside their differences after the moor fire and help WindClan with their lack of herbs. Lilywhisker even went so far as to train a WindClan apprentice, Magpiepaw to become the next medicine cat.

Thistlejaw's yellow gaze set on Coalkit and Yarrowkit, the two were only one moon younger than their half-siblings. *Maybe one of them will decide to dedicate their lives to healing clanmates.*

The two young toms looked at their half-siblings wide-eyed with excitement. Coalkit's fur was dark, but with lighter gray spots littering his pelt. His eyes were a dark yellow, almost golden like honey. Yarrowkit was a tabby like his mother, only a lighter shade of gray with black stripes and amber eyes.

A big brown tabby with jet black paws hopped onto the High-Branch and announced to the camp, "May all cats old enough to climb, gather beneath the High-Branch for a clan meeting!" his voice carried across the forest hollow.

"Otterstar is calling a clan meeting! It's time for us to be apprentices!" Snakekit exclaimed, running with Swankit to the base of the tree. Ebonyfern purred with amusement and nudged Rosekit with her nose.

"Go on, Rosekit. It's alright." The dark tabby she-cat soothed. The young tom nodded nervously and joined his siblings. Thistlejaw sat in the crowd of cats, proudly watching as the three kits were called up to Otterstar.

The former leader, Mintstar had, unfortunately, died two moons ago due to her old age. She peacefully passed away while she was asleep. Otterstar appointed Marshfoot as his deputy. A wise choice considering Dovedapple and Whirlsplash were far too hot-headed to take on any leadership roles.

"Until you have received your warrior names, you three will be

known as Swanpaw, Snakepaw, and Rosepaw." Otterstar said.

Thistlejaw lifted his muzzle in the air and chanted the names of the three along with his clanmates. After the chanting had died down, Otterstar flicked the tip of his tail and touched noses with each of the newly-made apprentices.

"Fogpelt, you haven't had an apprentice yet, but you have served your clan well with your clever hunting tactics and your courage. I hope you'll pass what you've learned onto Swanpaw." Otterstar looked down at the young gray tabby tom.

Fogpelt dipped his head and joined his apprentice's side, "Of course, Otterstar."

Otterstar continued, "Crowstrike, you have made many mistakes in the past. But I believe this is going to be a great step in gaining your clanmates' trust back. Will you mentor Rosepaw and teach him the importance of strength and the Warrior Code?"

Everyone's eyes drifted to the dark gray-and-white tom warily. He looked uncomfortable, but he lifted his head and nodded anyways, "I promise I won't let you down, Otterstar."

The brown tabby dipped his head thankfully at the warrior and looked at Thistlejaw next. The attention made the tom's heart pound in his chest.

"And lastly, Thistlejaw. If any cat is deserving of an apprentice, it's you. You've served your clan well with your quick observation and your dedication. I hope you'll do well in passing these things onto Snakepaw." Otterstar finished.

Thistlejaw touched noses with Snakepaw happily. *My first apprentice! I'll teach her so many things. You'll be the best warrior in ShadowClan when I'm through with you!*

"Swanpaw! Snakepaw! Rosepaw!" The clan cheered again for the final time.

Snakepaw rushed ahead of Thistlejaw, her different colored eyes bright with wonder. Orange and yellow leaves were strewn along the forest floor along with dead pine needles. Thistlejaw could feel a chill in the breeze, reminding him of the harsh Leafbare that was to be ahead of them.

"Slow down, Snakepaw!" He warned the calico she-cat, "I didn't take you on a trip to check on the borders just for you to accidentally cross one!"

The she-cat rolled her eyes and paused at the WindClan border. Her pelt prickled with fascination as she admired the vast and open moor. The grass was golden in the light of the setting sun, and the breeze made it look like rippling waves.

Thistlejaw's heart ached when he noticed the tall oak tree. The very same one he and Adderstorm used to have their meetings in. His whiskers twitched at the memories that came flooding into his mind and he padded over to it quietly.

Snakepaw followed closely behind him, "Woah! I want to climb it!" she gasped.

He chuckled softly and pointed out the spots on the tree trunk where Snakepaw could easily grip with her claws. He took a running start and leapt at the tree, climbing onto a branch just as he did moons ago. It took Snakepaw a couple of tries before she made it up next to Thistlejaw on the branch.

"Everything looks so small from up here!" Snakepaw said.

Thistlejaw wasn't looking at the ground. Instead, the tom focused on the gradually darkening sky, lost in his own thoughts. *I still miss you terribly, Adderstorm. But you gave me the strength to continue on with my life and I promise I will not take it for granted.*

You gave me friendship and love when no other cat would, and I thank you for that. Loyalty is something we all must learn at a young age in the Clans, but to keep holding onto it is difficult at times.

We may have broken the Code by meeting up and speaking to one

another, but I don't regret it. I swear I will keep loyalty burning strong in my Clan for as long as I have left.

Snakepaw's voice interrupted his thoughts once more as she climbed back onto the ground below, "Come on Thistlejaw. I don't want to stay around here all night. Show me how to catch prey in the dark!" she pleaded.

Thistlejaw shook his head and sighed, "I'm coming you noisy furball. With your luck, you might've scared every mouse back in their hole." The blue-gray tom hopped down from branch to branch until he was safely on the ground. Then, the two ShadowClan cats headed back into the shelter of the forest.

A sleek brown tabby with stars in his pelt sat on the same branch in the oak tree that Thistlejaw had previously been sitting. His glimmering green eyes shone with a bittersweet expression as he watched the two disappear into the bushes.

"I miss you too, Thistlejaw."

Final Allegiances

Windclan:

Leader: Heronstar - A small light gray tom with blue eyes

Deputy: Embermask- A white tom with ginger face markings, hazel eyes

Medicine Cat: Magpiepaw- A black tom with green eyes and white markings on his shoulders like magpie wings *(Being trained by Lilywhisker)*

Warriors:

Robinbriar -A long-haired dark brown tom with ginger patches and blue-purple eyes.

Badgerfur- Black and white she-cat with pale amber eyes

Starlingwing- A brown yellow-eyed she-cat with white speckles on her back.

Redstripe- Reddish brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Fawnpool- A brown she-cat with white paws and amber eyes

Juniperlight- A black she-cat with a white tipped tail and yellow eyes

Pebblepelt- A mottled brown she-cat with honey colored eyes

Frostleap- A white tom with two light brown front paws and pale green eyes

Apprentices:

Willowpaw- A ginger she-cat with white paws and amber eyes *(Mentor is Robinbriar)*

Blossompaw- A brown she-cat with black stripes and hazel eyes *(Mentor is Juniperlight)*

Doepaw- A pale ginger she-cat with a black and white tail and amber eyes *(Mentor is Frostleap)*

Queens:

Hollywish- A broad-shouldered silver she-cat with dappled fur and dark blue eyes. Kits: **Featherkit-** A brown tom with blue eyes and a bobbed tail, **Rainkit-** A gray speckled she-kit with greenish-blue eyes, **Sandkit -** A brownish-gray tom with pale blue eyes

(Mate/Father is Robinbriar)

Elders:

Oatstep- A golden tabby tom with hazel eyes

Shadowclan:

Leader: Otterstar- A big brown and black striped tom with black paws, amber eyes

Deputy: Marshfoot- A long furred brown tom with black paws and pale yellow eyes

Medicine cat: Tawnyclaw- A dark ginger she-cat with black stripes, yellow-green eyes.

Warriors:

Thistlejaw- A broad-shouldered blue-gray tom with yellow eyes.

Crowstrike- A long furred dark gray tom with white markings and green eyes

Dovedapple- A pale brown and silver tabby she-cat, with blue-green eyes.

Whirlsplash- A big pale gray spotted tabby she-cat with black patches, with blue eyes.

Swiftflower- A sleek pale gray and black dappled she-cat with hazel eyes.

Breezeshine- a small gray dappled she-cat with hazel eyes

Fogpelt- a gray tabby tom with amber eyes

Apprentices:

Snakepaw- A calico she-cat with one amber eye and one blue eye *(Mentor is Thistlejaw)*

Swanpaw- A white she-cat with two gray patches around her yellow eyes *(Mentor is Fogpelt)*

Rosepaw- A black tom with ginger markings and blue eyes *(Mentor is Crowstrike)*

Queens:

Ebonyfern- A dark gray tabby she-cat with amber eyes. ***Kits:*** **Coalkit-** Dark gray tom with lighter gray spots and honey-yellow eyes **Yarrowkit-** A light gray tabby with black stripes and amber

eyes

(Father was Leopardwhisper, but is taken care of by Thistlejaw)

Elders:

Aspenshade- A dark blue-gray tom with amber eyes and a scarred pelt.

Jaggedfang- A thin tawny tom with a scarred face and a fang resting over his lower lip.

Thunderclan:

Leader: Oakstar- A pale brown tom with white ears and a white muzzle, light blue eyes.

Deputy: Sparrowstrike- A dark brown and white she-cat with dappled fur, green eyes.

Medicine cat: Ashbreeze A gray tabby tom with only three legs and amber eyes

Warriors:

Hollowpelt- A red-brown and black she-cat with black patches and green eyes

Emeraldtalon- A brown spotted tabby tom with black ears, brilliant green eyes

Minnowthroat- A long furred pale gray tabby tom with a white patch on his throat and yellow eyes

Brackendusk- A dark brown she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Creektail- A sleek white tabby tom with hazel eyes

Plumfur- A dark gray she-cat with lighter spots and blue eyes

Nightleaf- A gray she-cat with black paws and amber eyes

Lizardleap- A brown tom with lighter paws and a thin tail with green eyes

Nettletooth- A brown and cream colored she-cat with yellow eyes

Riverclan:

Leader: Tanglestar- A dark ginger spotted she-cat with amber eyes.

Deputy: Blizzardleaf- A big white tom with silver paws and amber eyes

Medicine cat: Lilywhisker- A light brown she-cat with a white underbelly, yellow eyes.

Medicine cat apprentice: Sheepbounce- A long furred white she-cat with yellow eyes

Warriors:

Spiderstripe- A cream colored she-cat with black stripes and amber eyes

Timbercloud- A dark gray tom with hazel eyes

Cherrypool- A ginger she-cat with white markings and blue eyes

Waspflight- A golden tabby tom with a black tipped tail and amber eyes

Mossypelt- A long-haired light brown she-cat with green eyes

Stonebranch- A silver tabby tom with golden eyes

Blackear- A sleek dark ginger tom with black ears

Cats Outside the Clans:

Berryfur- A thick-furred silver and black striped tom with pale green eyes

Tigerfrost- A long furred blue-gray tabby tom with white markings, black ears and amber eyes.

Newtfire- a dark brown tom with black tipped ears and a light brown muzzle with golden eyes

Mothcloud- A slim brown she-cat with a long black tail and blue eyes

Finchheart- A gray-brown dappled she-cat with pale green eyes